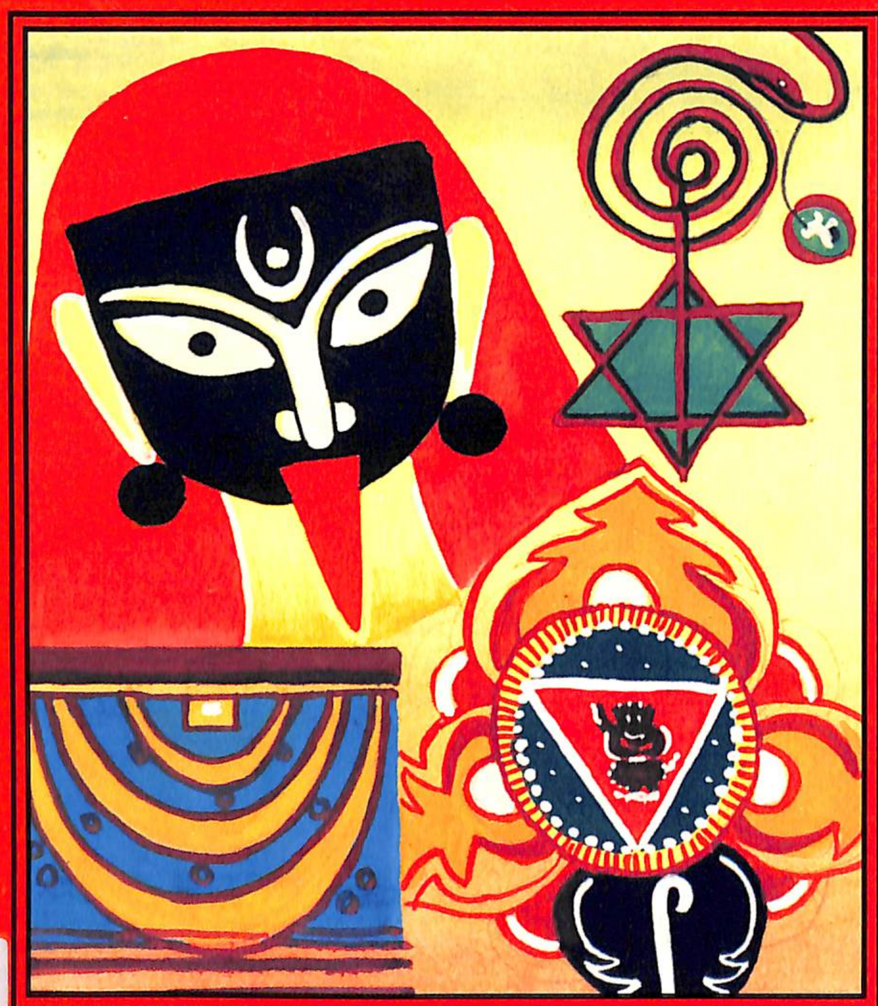
The ĀGAMA ENCYCLOPAEDIA

Volume VI

Ālaya and Ārādhanā



Prof. S.K. Ramachandra Rao

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The volume deals with the general problems relating to the idea of Āgama and the broad details of the tradition that is known after Āgama. In the historical perspective Āgamic tradition and the Vedic tradition were initially distinguished, but later the two fused. The circumstances that favoured the separation and integration have been explained. The role that Tantra played in crystallizing the Āgama tradition has been elaborately explained and illustrated. And more importantly the volumes deal almost exclusively with the essential details of temple-culture in India Without an adequate appreciation of this context, other aspects of Āgama cannot become meaningful. In one of the appendices, a fairly exhaustive account of Tantra has been given, for this has provided the major dimension to the Āgama, especially of the Śãkta pursuation.

The volumes which were originally published in the period 1989-1994 by the Kalpatharu Research Academy, Bangalore are being reprinted now, and I am grateful to my friend Shri Sunil Gupta of the Indian Books Centre, Delhi for publishing a revised edition of the volumes.

Bangalore
June, 2004

S.K. Ramachandra Rao



UTSAVA-MURTI OF VENKATESVARA OF TIRUMALA

Chapter I

ĀLAYA

THE TRADITIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The Indian temple as an art form has a human as well as a divine character. It exists in its material outfit as something that endures in space and time and as something that was a response to a situational need. It is a building, accomplished by engineers and masons who follow the laws of the physical world and employ their technical skill. Indian temple has almost a mathematical basis ; the mana-orientation was often in the nature of an obsession with the old temple-builders in India. But the inspiration to the build'ng activity was in every case derived from religious mysticism. The temple has also a psychological and spiritual existence. It is in the nature of 'sacred art', bringing man into contact with the divine. It enables him to feel the spiritual presence, and to find it in his own heart.

It is not so much to pray that a devotee visits a temple as to feel this presence. He could pray anywhere, and, as every devotee known, the well-known and popular temples of the present-day are the last places in the world where one can really get into a prayerful mood. If one does not have an inclination for this presence, he does not go beyond what is physical and visible in the temple. It is

not enough for the devotee to believe in God or to believe in the efficacy of prayer. He must have an intuitive apprehension of the presence that makes the temple a sacred enclosure and he must be eager to partake of that presence. Without such equipment, the temple would lack meaning and value.

Sensitivity to spiritual presence is not guided by considerations of utility. The Indian temple has been many things : art gallery, economic institution, political power, social organization, crafts-guild, fortress, and refectory. All this, however, has only contributed to the decay of the temple as a spiritual institution. The temple now inclines to be in a less austere setting. The civilization of machine has made an inroad into it. It is no longer "static and peaceful" as it used to be when the twin demons of speed and utility had not as yet possessed it or us. The human perspective has altered, and the temple has become a mere building, and, worse, an office.

The sanctity of the Indian temple depends not on its art or its utility but on its esoteric significance. The texts of Indian architecture are no doubt prolix and full of technical details; but they do not lose sight of the truth that the temple is chiefly meant, to be a tool of spiritual realization. The devotee goes to the temple with faith in his heart and expects to find grace in the shrine. It is only when man has faith that he can lay claim to grace. And faith does not need gnosis or understanding of the symbolism involved in the temple ; it even excludes intellection. What it needs is the appropriate mood. In order to create an atmosphere or a mood of holiness and sanctity, which would enable a devotee's faith to become more receptive to this spiritual presence, certain traditional

prescriptions like physical cleanliness, postural reverence, and ritual offering have been introduced.

The devotee would have intuitionally apprehended the symbolism. Ability to vocalize or convey it is a different thing, and may be wholly unnecessary. He would not be seduced by the illusion of anthropomorphism ; he would not mistake the human looking icon for a mere human being, nor a temple for a mere building. Art in the temple will not distract him, and technical skill will not hold his attention. He floats over these obstacles and directly reaches the shrine to receive grace.

But when the traditional hold has been loosened, intellectual apprehension of symbolism becomes necessary. Understanding must augment faith. But nothing can be more harmful than attempting to understand ancient images by contemporary attitudes. We often slip into the error of wanting to understand things without really involving ourselves in them. No door can be opened with merely collecting an odd assortment of keys. The proper key must be selected and involved in the lock. The attitude for understanding needs to be relevant, legitimate and receptive. The pretensions and prejudices of the modern mind can easily lead one astray. Unless sincerity and humility are allowed to inspire the urge to understand, the understanding is bound to be defective and superficial.

The Indian temple has its own symbolism, at once profound, mysterious and relevant for all time. The 'manifestation' of this symbol-complex is in terms of elaborate and intricate spatial 'projections, material masses of constructions, passionate patterns of forms, and schematic representations of technical skill. Such manifestations, possessing an objective character, are

sought to be described and classified according to prevalent styles in well-defined periods of time and within certain territorial confines. But the 'content' of the temple is an abstract something hidden within (or revealed through) these 'objective' appearances, and quite unattached to styles or periods. It has an inner dimension which is real for the devotee but elusive for a visitor to the temple. The latter is interested in what 'is' out there, while the former is concerned with what 'may be' in relation to himself. This veiling of the content for a casual person (that is to say, one devoid of faith) is one of the functions of art, for art does not reveal so much as conceal.

The content cannot be concrete. But it is real, provided the perspective is proper. One of the errors the casual man is prone to is the thought that whatever is not manifest either does not exist or is not relevant. He does not suspect that the things that do not appear before the senses may appear to the mind, that what is not apprehended by the intellect may be understood by intuition. Manifestation is in reality an incarnation of the content, which is available only to intuition.

It is natural that the aspect of manifestation comes to be formalized. The temple is a public institution ; its appeal is collective. The priest performs the worship-ritual, not for his own sake but for the sake of all (parārtha); unlike in the worship at home. For the devotee, worship in the temple cannot be a substitute for worship at home. In fact, worship at home is obligatory, while the visit to a temple is optional. There is an interesting account of the origin of temples in the celebrated text, *Visrṇjudharmottara* :

Time is divided in ancient Indian thought into four

immense periods, Kṛta, Tretā, Dvāpara and Kali. Kali is the dark age we now live in, and temples appeared only during this period. In the first of these divisions, there was no need for temples because gods lived and moved amongst humans. In the next division, the presence of gods became scarce and they descended on earth only when men invoked them in sacrifices ; but then they came as gods. In the third great division of time, men had only to make images of these gods and worship them; and the gods came down in disguised forms, showering their grace. The worship at that time was only domestic ; the shrines were within the precincts of homes. During the last phase of time, temples (as public shrines) began to be built and icons were installed. But the gods ceased coming down in their own or disguished forms. However, their presence was felt when the icons were properly installed, and temples correctly built. The priests, who were professional performers of worship, were the only ones who were competent to compel this presence; others could only be participants and beneficiaries. In the early phases of this period, the sages merely installed the icons, and the divine presence was with them ever after. But in the later and decadent phases, the presence could be secured only by continuous worship and periodical festivals.

This is an interesting account, where historical facts are combined with symbolic interpretations. Temples were later than domestic shrines. In the remains of the Indus Valley civilizations, we find evidences of domestic shrines ; but there is no trace of a public temple. And domestic shrines were later than the magical procedures (sacrifices and rituals), which came into vogue only at a

stage when man felt separated from the supranormal forces. Magical rites, domestic shrines and temple-complexes may, in a sense, be considered as distinct phases of religious evolution ; but it would be an error to look upon that evolution as a succession of disappearing and appearing phases. Magical rites, domestic shrines and temple-complexes co-exist in Indian life, and they have always done so. This co-existence has been possible because all three are essentially symbols; and as symbols they do not deny history but transcend it.

Thus it becomes important to recognize that Indian temples have sprung from a traditional symbol that is at once ancient and enduring. The temple would remain an enigma for one who fails to appreciate the content as well as the manifestation of this symbol. For one who stops at the manifestations of this symbol the temple would present itself as 'luminous obscurity' (the expression of Frithjob Schuon, in another context); and one who would be content with considering only the content would see it as 'obscured light'. The symbol is revealed not only by its material manifestation but also by a vision of its content. The vision in this case is both aesthetic and spiritual.

In order to enable our understanding the aesthetic as well as the spiritual aspects of the temple-symbol, the Indian tradition has crystallized a doctrinal approach which comprehends the idea, the method, and the purpose behind the temple-building activity. The approach is referred to as 'Āgama', which indeed is a generic expression meaning "that which has come from a hoary past": it is the ever-active presence of a useful framework for our thoughts and actions, for our growth and fulfillment.

'Āgama' with reference to temple deals with the temple-building activities as well as the procedures of worship in temples. The former appears to emphasize aesthetics, while the latter the spiritual aspect. But the distinction between them is arbitrary and unreal, for Beauty and Serenity cannot in fact be separated.

There are doctrinal formulations in Āgama regarding the selection of proper land for the temple, the purificatory ceremonies prior to the construction, the plan 'lay-out', direction, size, relative proportions of the plinth and other structural parts, permissible decorations and embellishments, installation of icons and deities in the sanctum as well as in the niches and pavilions, rituals of daily worship and periodical festivals, purifications and sacramental activities, and so on. These formulations take manifestations and content of the symbol as two complementary elements.

The temple as an incarnation of the symbol is the medium of rituals. Ritual is active thought. Rituals are actions that lead to contemplation, and contemplation strives to achieve the serenity of consciousness that lifts one from the stress of common life. The Āgama focuses attention on the temple as a pattern of rituals. It provides us with a perspective to understand the symbol and act effectively with regard to it. It seeks to construct for us a half-way house between the limitations that we have and the perfection we aim at. Limitations are inherent in human life; we live amidst what pass for the commonplace and the ugly. Perfection is a divine quality; it is also beautiful. The purpose of rituals is to facilitate the passage from the commonplace to the unique, from ugliness to beauty, from what is human to what may be divine.

The Āgama had an earlier oral tradition, communicated through generations of craftsmen and priests. It has also a later written tradition, consisting of hundreds of texts and manuals meant for craftsmen and priests. The oral tradition has almost disappeared, for craftsmen as well as priests have fallen on decadent days. The texts and manuals have, for the same reason, gone into oblivion, neglected by those for whom they were meant and ignored by others in the community. Fortunately, however, many of these literary works are available, mostly in manuscripts and some of them in print. The literary tradition comprises of works that are usually classified into three classes: revelations (divya), composition of sages (muni-prokta) and writings of ordinary men (pauruśa). The revealed texts claim a hoary antiquity and have been relied upon by the other two classes of works. The compositions of sages are original works, based on inspiration, intuition and contemplation. They now exist only in citations and fragments. The third group of works is largely in the nature of compilations of relevant passages from the compositions of sages. They employ intelligence and reason, and are also liable to err. They are chronologically recent, and some of them are what the priests and craftsmen mostly have relied upon for several generations now.

The fundamental assumption in this mixed tradition is that Divinity has two aspects : the hidden and pervasive aspect (niṣkala), and the manifest and specific aspect (sakala). The former is abstract and is likened to oil in the seasasum seeds, fire in fuel, butter in milk, and scent in flower. It is all- pervasive and is settled in the human heart as the 'inner-guide' (an-taryāmin). It has no form,

and is not apprehended by sense-organs or by the ordinary mind. The latter, however, is concrete, like fire that has come out of the fuel, or oil that has been pressed out of the seeds, or butter that floats on the surface when milk is churned. It has numerous forms, and man can realize Divinity through these forms ; but an act of worship is necessary. The tradition enumerates and describes not only the forms the Divinity may assume to facilitate man's approach but prescribes rituals that are involved in such an approach. We find in these texts descriptions of icons as visible symbols of Divinity and details of worship with regard to them (arcā). This in fact is the burden of most of these books. Incidently, they also discuss associated problems of practical import such as the methods and materials employed in the fashioning of icons, installation of these icons and consecration of temples. Sometimes they expatiate on alternate or accessory approaches such as fire-rituals (homa), meditational exercises (dhyāṇạ or yoga), recitations (japa), and intellectual appreciation of spiritual involvement (jñāna).

When iconic forms and wọrship rituals became the principal contents of these texts (especially those texts of accreditedly human origin), there was naturally an introduction of sectarian differences. The three main sects flourishing in India for two thousand years now, Śaiva, Śākta and Vaiṣṇava, developed their own distinctive lineages, their own metaphysical positions, their own deities, and their own rituals of worship. But the essential framework remains common for all of them. And there is a tradition of each sect borrowing freely from the texts belonging to other sects whenever necessary. For instance, some of the manuals of the Pāñcarātra sect of Vaiṣṇava

persuation are chronologically early and numerically large. We find that the sectarians of the Vaikhānasa division of Vaiṣṇava as well as the

Śaiva rely on many prescriptions and explanations found in Pāñcarātra books. Prejudices and differences become wholly irrelevant in the higher reaches of approach to the Divine.

The caves were naturally the earliest shrines. And caves were also places where the primitive burial relics or the funerary urns were preserved. The memory of the cave-shrines lingered on in the Upaniṣadic 'heart-cave'. Where natural caves were not readily available, people constructed cave-like shrines. But these would obviously have been flimsy, being little more than thatched huts or bamboo-and-mud houses. Among the tribes in which this practice still survives, as among the Todas, the resemblance of these shrines to natural caves is striking. We have no clues regarding their nature of appearance, for the ravages of time have wiped them out. But the tiled, sloping and conical roofs of the temples in the West Coast may be regarded as survivals.

The stūpas are the earliest shrines on record as well as in actual evidence. The expression stūpa means a heap of grain or a mound of earth. As a heap of grain it was precious; and as a mound of earth it was a monument. The word is found in Yajurveda in the sense of a precious monument (Viṣnoh stūpah). We have reference to agnidriya, which was the Vedic stūpa. The building of stūpas must, therefore, have been a very ancient practice. But it loomed into enormous importance during the days of Aśoka. The large number of stūpas that emperor Asoka is said to have built have all disappeared. But the architectural form of

the stūpa that was finalized during his days survived in many later stūpas, like those at Bārhut, Bodhgayā, Sārnāth and Sāñci, which were all structures built during the first and the third centures B.C., although they have been repaired and enlarged periodically. This Buddhist adaptation was a massive hemispherical structure, filled with earth, pebbles and stone, mantled by bricks, and covered by stone slabs. It was erected on a broad circular platform (medhī), providing a passage for ceremonial circumambulation, and fenced by a running railing (vedikā). On top of this plain tumulus was a quadrangular terrace



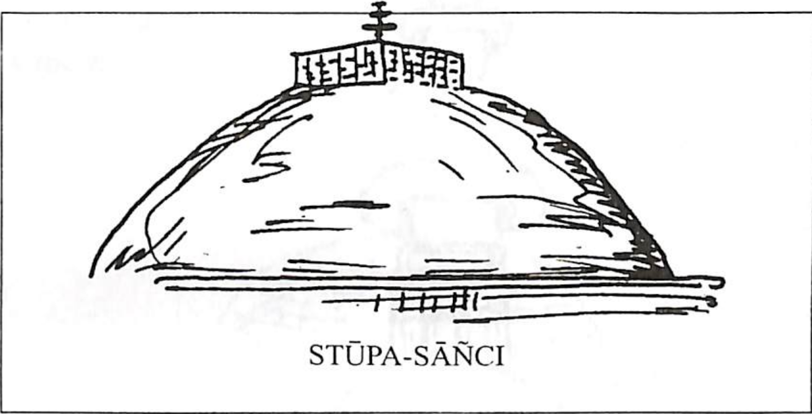
Sāranāth Stūpa

(harmikā), over which was placed a parasol (catra) signifying spiritual sovereignty.

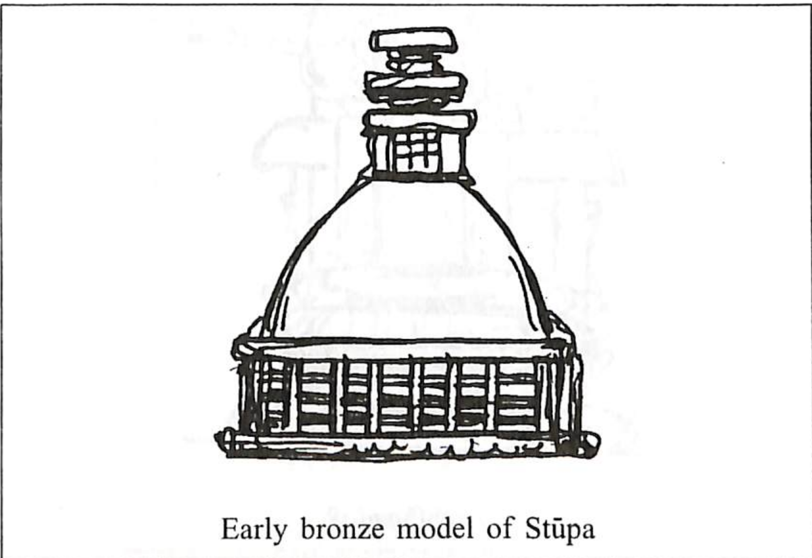
The area of the stūpa was enclosed by gateways (torana) on the four sides; this enclosure derives from a tāntrik background. The real significance of the stūpa lies in the *mana*-articles that it contains. The technical expression for the stūpa is dhātu- garbha (the original for the Sinhalese 'dāgoba'), which means "the womb of the relic'. The relic may be the physical remains of a great man of spiritual strength, such as his bones, tufts of hair, or nail pairings (śārika), or articles that he had used such as his robes, begging bowl, or a piece of his staff (pāribhogika), or symbols of high attainment like the wheel, the triple-gem or a miniature stūpa itself (uddeśika). The introduction of such relics into the body of the stūpa is accompanied by magical rituals. The square enclosure facing the four quarters is meant to contain and intensify the power of this relic; it guards the relic from the intrusion of distracting and inimical forces. The maṇḍala form of a circle contained within a square with openings on four sides is concretized in the stūpa.

The relic is thus the essence of the stūpa. The stūpa is also called the 'egg' (aṇḍa) as it contains the 'relic-seed' within. The funeral tumulus is in a very real sense a magical monument. The wealth of sculptural representations involved in the gateways and pilasters are to be regarded as essentially mystical in character and purpose. While there are narrative sculptures depicting the main events in the Buddha's life, most of the carvings have a magical purpose. Sometimes; folk sprites and goblins (yakṣas and yakṣiṇis) are also represented, for the same purpose.

There is a measure of truth in the saying that a Hindu temple is a successor to the Buddhist stūpa. But it is not readily recognised that the Buddhist stūpa itself is a successor to the Vedic stūpa, which can be traced back to the cave-shrines. The Buddhist stūpa is as magical in its intent as the Vedic stūpa was, and it involved rituals even as the latter did, although of a different kind.

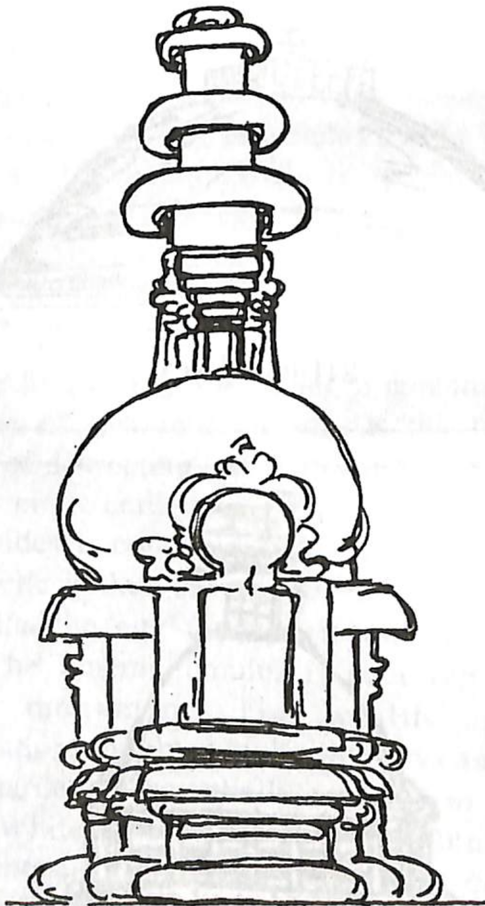


STŪPA-SĀÑCI



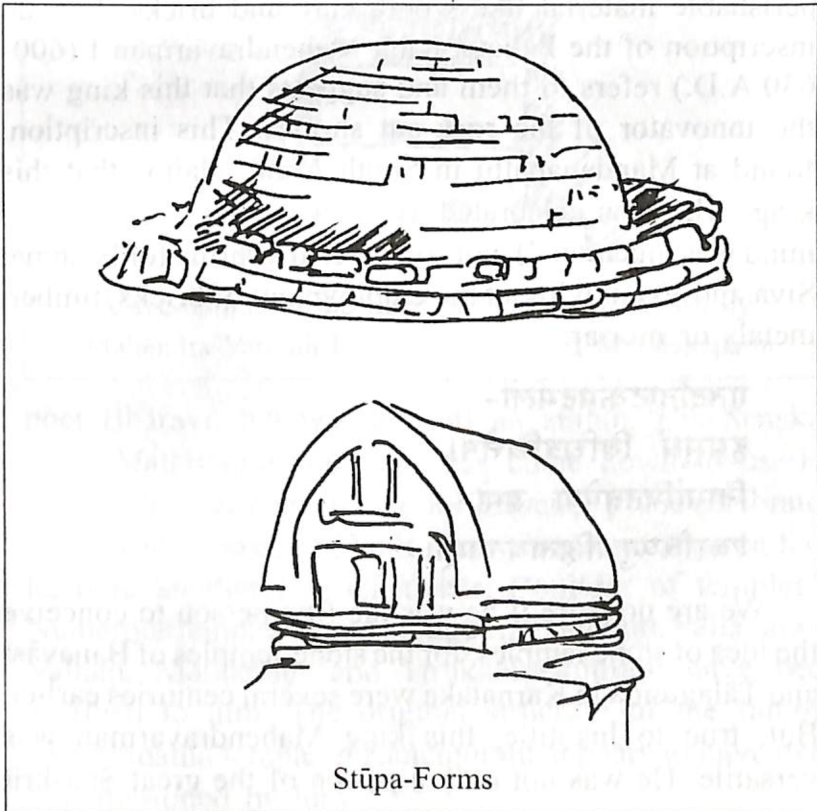
Early bronze model of Stūpa

Another innovation that was chronologically parallel to the Buddhist stūpas was the, excavated caves like those of Junnār (one hundred and fifty caves, near Poona, about 100 A.D.), Kriṣṇagiri or Kanheri (eight caves, near Bombay, about 150-189 A.D.), Ajaṇṭā (about twenty seven caves, the first few centuries after Christ) and Ellorā (about thirty three caves, about 550-750 A.D.). These caves were



Stūpa

excavated from hard, living rocks on the faces of hills. They were elaborately carved and richly ornamented by pillars, arches and pierced windows. These excavated caves, however, were more in the nature of retreats and settlements for monks and hermits than shrines in the strict sense of the term. They were far removed from the austere and simple cave-shrines, both in design and purpose. Even though they had a shrine area containing either a stūpa image or a Buddha icon, the major portion of the excavated cave was utilized for the assembly hall, habitation cells, porch, and the verandah. These caves were meant to be ornate and architectural monuments.



Stūpa-Forms

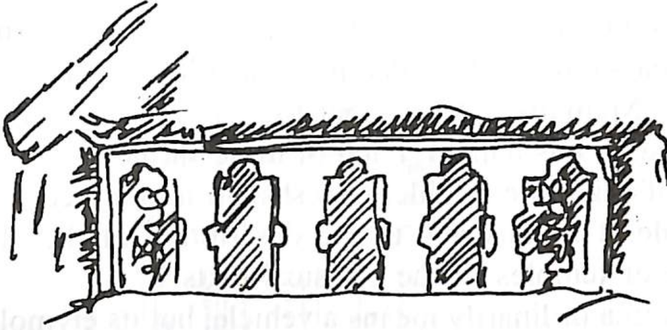
There was more of the art in them than of the shrine. Here is an instance of the image dominating the icon.

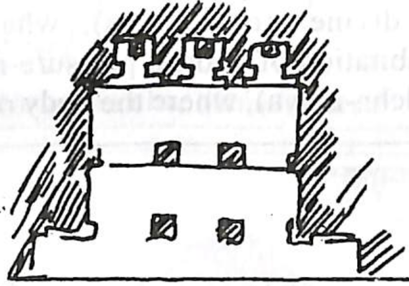
The significance of these cave-sanctuaries is that the simple shrine was fast becoming a public institution, where people gathered not only to offer worship but to meet monks and listen to their discourses. The sacred calling of the residents of these cave-monasteries had now secular involvements. Sects developed, affiliations began, and the shrine element was minimized.

It is not to be imagined that the cave-shrines were the only kind of shrines that prevailed during those days. There must have been numerous shrines constructed of perishable material like wood, clay and bricks. For, an inscription of the Pallava King Mahendravarman I (600-630 A.D.) refers to them and suggests that this king was the innovator of the rock-cut shrines. This inscription, found at Mandagapaṭṭu in South Arcot, claims that this king, who was celebrated as 'Vicitra-citta' ('one whose mind was ingenious'), got constructed a shrine for Brahmā, Siva and Viṣṇu without the employment of bricks, timber, metals or mortar:

एतदनिष्टकमद्रुमलो-
हमसुधं विचित्रचित्तेन।
निर्म्मापितन्नृपेण ब्रम्हे-
श्वरविष्णुलक्षितायतनम्॥

We are not sure if he was the first person to conceive the idea of stone temples, for the stone-temples of Banavāsi and Tālaguṇḍa in Karnataka were several centuries earlier. But, true to his title, this king Mahendravarman was versatile. He was not only a patron of the great Sanskrit



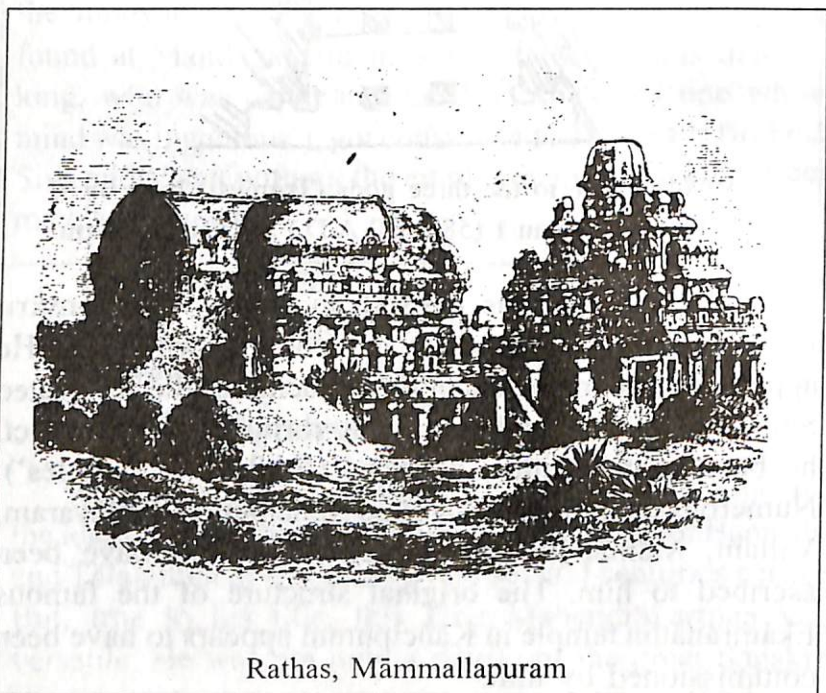


Cave-temple to the three gods (Trimūrti) built by Mahendra-Varman I (580-630 A.D.) at Mandagapaṭṭu

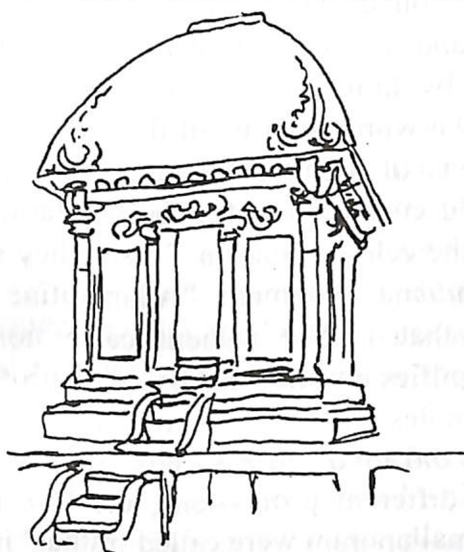
poet Bhāravi, but was himself an author. His Sanskrit farce *Mattavilāsa-prahasana* has come down to us. He appears to have come under the influence of the celebrated Śaiva saint Appar, and built many shrines to Śiva. In fact, he bore another title Cheṭṭakāri ('builder of temples'). Numerous temples in and around Kāñcipuram, Pallāvaram, Vallam, Māmaṇḍūr and Tirukkaḷukkuṇram have been ascribed to him. The original structure of the famous Ekāṁranātha temple in Kāñcīpuram appears to have been commissioned by him.

But it was his successor, Narasiṁhavarman I (630-668 A.D.) who built the world-famous monolithic shrines on the sea-shore in Māmallapuram, near Madras. He bore the title 'Māmalla' ('the great-fighter'), after which the township was named. Each of these shrines has been cut out of a granite boulder and shaped into a free-standing temple. This answers to the description of the "Ratha" style of temples in the classical texts.

Ratha ordinarily means a vehicle, but its etymological import is to 'play and enjoy' (ramu krīdāyām). In classical texts, four kinds of 'rathas' are distinguished : 'metrical' (chando-maya), where a hymn becomes a vehicle of expression; 'divine' (deva-maya), where a structure becomes a habitation of gods, a pleasure-resort for them; 'corporeal' (deha-maya), where the body of ours becomes



Rathas, Māmmallapuram



Draupadi-ratha, Māmallapuram



Draupadī-Ratha

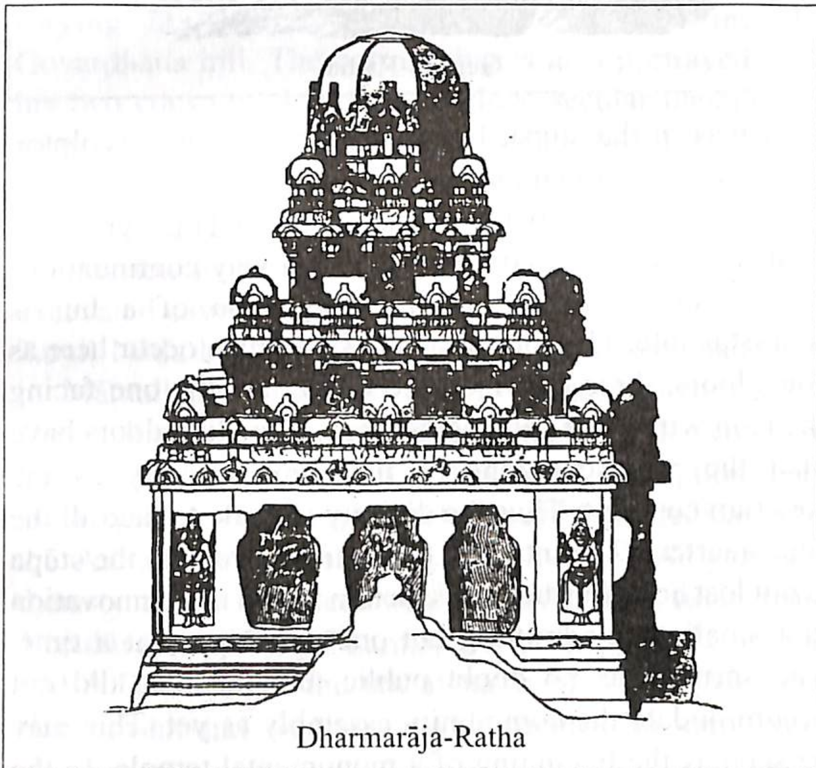
a means for the conveyance of karma-dispositions through several lives; and 'transport' (vāha-maya), signifying the chariots used by kings and warriors in the battlefield. *Ṛgveda* uses the word ratha in all these four senses. The old Indian texts of architecture take the expression to mean any solid construction for the habitation of gods, fashioned by the celestial mason Tvastr; they rely on the *Taittirīya-brāhmaṇa* statement "Adamantine is ratha" ('vajro vai rathah'). The ancient caste nomenclature 'rathakāra' signifies not the "makers of chariots" but "the builders of temples"; it was a 'mixed caste' inasmuch as the work they did involved a variety of skills and a co-ordination of different professions, the five monolithic shrines in Māmallapuram were called 'rathas' in the sense of 'divine habitations' sculpted by men.



Hut-shrine model for Draupadi Ratha

These shrines have been popularly, but fancifully, named after the Pāṇḍava ḥeroes and their consort Draupadī. The most interesting shrine in this group is the one named after Draupadī. It is actually a shrine dedicated to the Mother Goddess. It is arch itecturally simple and artistically elegant. It is a one-celled shrine containing the icon of standing Durgā carved in relief. The cell on a raised platform is approached by a flight of three steps. The opening is flanked by stylized 'door-guardians'; the other sides have niches containing replicas of the icon within the cell.

This represents a major shift in the conception of a shrine. It is not any relic that is contained within the cella,



Dharmarāja-Ratha



Ganesh-Raṭha

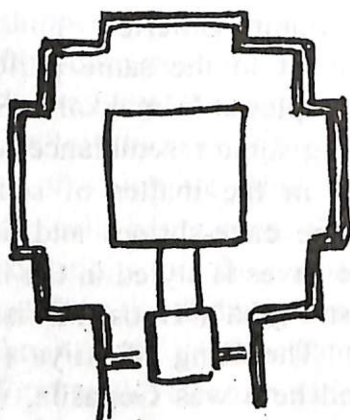
as it was in the stūpa, but an icon carved by a sculptor. And the icon- containing chamber was not closed but was open to the worshipper. The square plan and the pyramidal roof (although four-cornered) are in a way continuations of the stūpa theme; but the suggestion of a hut is unmistakable. The four toraṇas of the stūpa occur here as four doors, three of which are blind, and the one facing the icon within the cella being open. The blind doors have also the representations of the same divinity as the sanctum contains. Thus the divinity is made to face all the four quarters. The intent of the four gateways to the stūpa is not lost here. Further, the sanctum which is an innovation is a small one, admitting but one worshipper at a time. The shrine was no doubt public, but the idea did not accommodate the community assembly as yet. This may be seen as the beginning of a monumental temple. In the

canonical description, it is the sanctum alone that constitutes the real temple. Here is therefore the basic shrine. The shrine named after Dharmarāja, which is located at the other end of the series, is actually dedicated to Śiva ; it has a linga installed in the sanctum. But the cella is surmounted by a pyramidal and turrated vimāna which provided the model for all vimānas in the temple of the Dravidian style. The portico is Open and pillared.

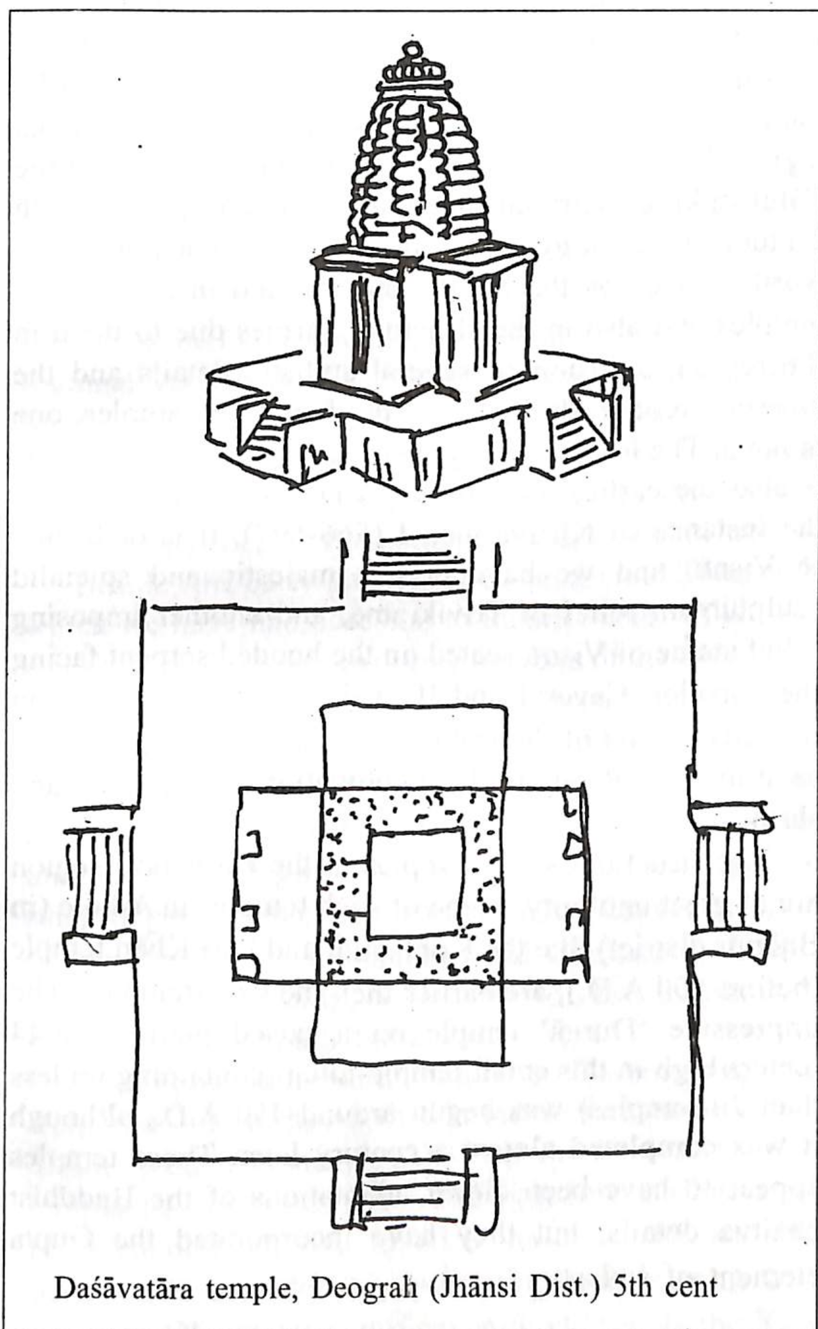
If these shrines are rather sparse in sculptural details and mythological representations, there are about ten excavated rock-cut halls nearby which are in the nature of pillared assembly halls (mandapas) where excellent sculptural panels are carved in rock-reliefs; the themes are mythological such as Varāha rescuing the earth, Durgā slaying the Buffalo-demon, and Kṛṣṇa lifting the Govardhana hill. The patron king is also portrayed with his two consorts. Sculptures include secular themes and animal portraiture. These maṇḍapas are not in the nature of shrines; art is of predominant interest here and they may be regarded as sculpture-galleries.

Ascribable almost to the same period are the two excavated cave- temples at Nāmakkal in Salem district in Tamiḷ Nāḍu bearing some resemblance to the mandapas in Māmallapuram in the matter of sculptured panels. These, however, are cave-shrines and are dedicated to Viṣṇu. One of the caves is styled in the inscription there as 'Atiyanātha-visṇu-gṛha' ('House of Viṣṇu dedicated by the Atiya King'). The King of Atiya (or Aḍiyanman) dynasty mentioned here was Guṇaśīla, who ruled from Tagaḍūr (present-day Dharmapurī) in Tamiḷ. Nāḍu, around 750 A.D. Three of the ten avatāras of Viṣṇu (Vāmana, Narasiṁ-ha and Varāha) provide themes for some very





Bhitargaon Brick Temple (Gupta period, 5th cent)



Daśāvatāra temple, Deograh (Jhānsi Dist.) 5th cent

fine sculptures; and the narrative style has been employed. The representations are vigorous, if also somewhat stylized.

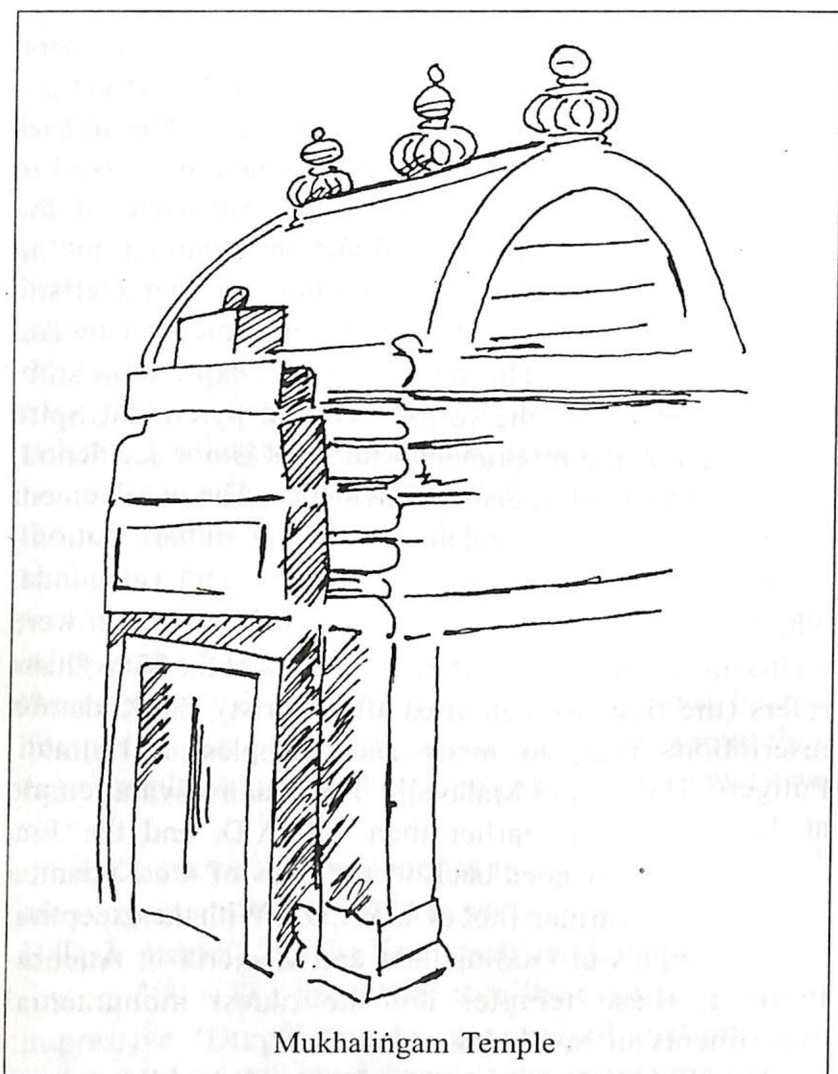
An interesting group of four cave-temples are to be found at Bādāmi, a charming valley in the Karnaṭaka region. The caves were excavated during the reigns of the Cāḷukya kings, Kīrtivar-man I and Maṅgaḷīśa, in the sixth century. These kings were in cultural contact with the North as well as the South, and we find in these cave-temples and also in the structural shrines due to them in the region, a fusion of several stylistic details and the emergence of fresh styles. Of the four cave-temples, one is Jaina. The largest among them, known as cave No. 111, is also the earliest (about 578 A.D.), and was carved at the instance of Kīrtivarman I (566-597). It is dedicated to Viṣṇu, and we have here a majestic and splendid sculpture in relief of Trivikrama, and another imposing relief statue of Viṣṇu seated on the hooded serpent facing the corridor. Caves I and II, dedicated to Siva, bear an obvious impact of the last cave in the Ajanta group these cave-temples illustrate the combination of sanctuary and shrine.

The structural stone-temples in the Karṇātaka region are of great antiquity. Some of such temples in Aihoḷe (in Bijāpur district) like the Kontaguḍi and Lāḍ-Khān temple (before 500 A.D.), are earlier then the cave-temples. The impressive 'Durgā' temple on a raised platform 2.44 meters high in this small temple-town (containing no less than 70 temples) was begun around 450 A.D., although it was completed almost a century later. These temples appear to have been clever adaptations of the Buddhist chaitya details, but they have incorporated the Gupta element of śikhara.

The Guptas (330-530 A.D.) were great temple-builders; and the earliest of the extent and independent structural temples in the North date back to their times. The śikhara as a monumental spire on top of the sanctum evolved in the fifth century, probably under the patronage of the Gupta kings. As a massive dome surmounted by an ornamental pinnacle (stūpi), it became the characteristic feature of the Indian temple, permitting some stylistic and regional variations. The relation of the expression stūbī for the pinnacle of the formalized and pyramidal Spire with Stūpa as the monumental tumulus is not accidental; nor is it merely a linguistic coincidence. The involvement of the stūpa idea is fundamental to the śikhara notion.

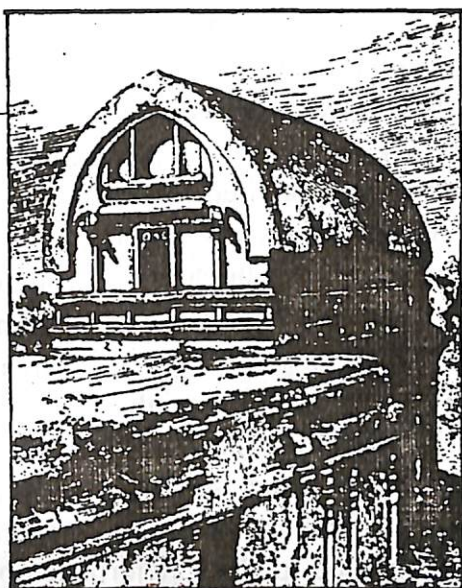
Besides the early temples at Banavāsi and Tālaguṇḍa, which we have had occasion to mention and which were well-known shrines even during the days of the Śātavāhana rulers (the first two centuries after Christ), the Kadaṁba inscriptions refer to many such temples in Halmidi, Puligere, Halasi and Malavaḷḷi. The Praṇaveśvara temple at Tālaguṇḍa was earlier than 450 A.D. and the Jina temple at Halasi goes back to the days of the Kadaṁba ruler Mṛgeśa-varman (about 455 A.D.). With the exception of the temples at Guḍimallam and Chejeria in Āndhra-Pradesh, these temples are the oldest monumental experiments in South India.

The Parasurāmeśvara temple at Guḍimallam (near Reṅiguṇṭa in North Ārcot district) is said to be a work of the second century A.D. The chief interest of this temple lies in the unusual and probably earliest iconic representation of Śiva found in its cella. We will have occasion to consider this interesting icon in some detail later on. Of greater significance, however, is the Kapo-

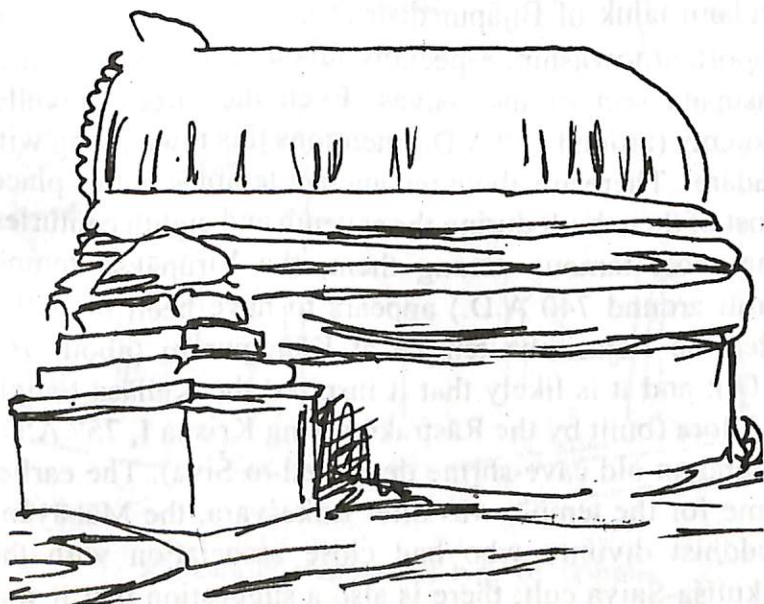


Mukhaliṅgam Temple

tīśvara shrine at Chejeria in Āndhra Pradesh. This structural temple was built probably in the fourth century at the instance of the kings of the Ānanda gotra lineage who ruled over parts of the present-day Guṇṭūr district in Āndhra Pradesh during the first few centuries of the Christian era. Although it is now a Śiva shrine, it was



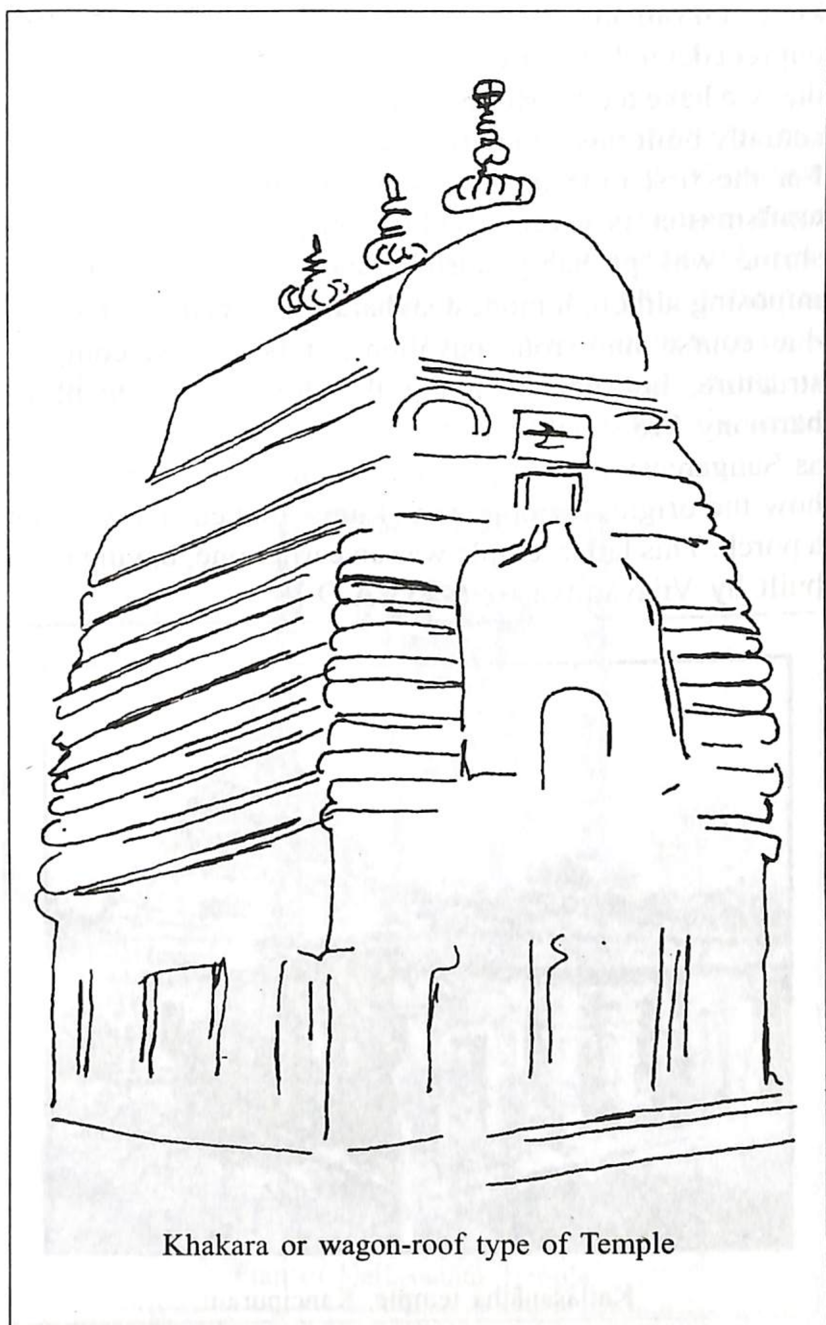
Ter Caitya



Chejerla Temple

undoubtedly meant to be a Buddhist sanctuary. It was probably the kingi Dāmodara-varman, whom an inscription describes as "devoted to the feet of the perfectly enlightened Buddha" (samyak-saṁbuddha-pādānudhyāta) that built this shrine, which is modelled after the oblong Buddhist chaitya-hall in the 'back-of-the-elephant' (gajapṛṣṭha) shape. There is an interesting suggestion that the Pallava ruler Mahendra-varman, who was a great enthusiast of the stone-shrines was a kinsman of the royal family of Ānanda-gotṛa lineage (as also of the Viṣṇukuṇḍi kings), was inspired by the Chejeria temple. It may be noticed that rock-cut shrines (the so-called Pāṇḍava rathas), especially the ones named after Bhīma and Sahadeva, bear a definite resemblance to the Chejeria temple.

Within the kingdom of the Cāḷukyas of Bādāmi was Paṭṭadakallu (called Kisovoḷaḷ in old texts), now in the Bādāmi taluk of Bijāpur district in Karṇāṭaka. It was an important township, especially favoured by the Lakulīśa-Pāśupata sect of the Śaivas. Even the Greek traveller Ptolemy (around 150 A.D.) mentions this town along with Bādāmi. There are about ten ancient temples in this place, most of them built during the seventh and eighth centuries. The most famous among them, the Virūpākṣa temple (built around 740 A.D.) appears to have been modelled after the Rājasiṁha temple at Kāñcīpuram (about 700 A.D.); and it is likely that it inspired the Kailāsa temple at Ellora (built by the Rāsṭrakūṭa king Kṛiṣṇa I, 757 A.D., around an old cave-shrine dedicated to Śiva). The earlier name for the temple was after Lokeśvara, the Māhāyāna Buddhist divinity who had close association with the Lakulīśa-Śaiva cult; there is also a suggestion that it was named so after Loka-mahādevī, the queen of the Cāḷukya



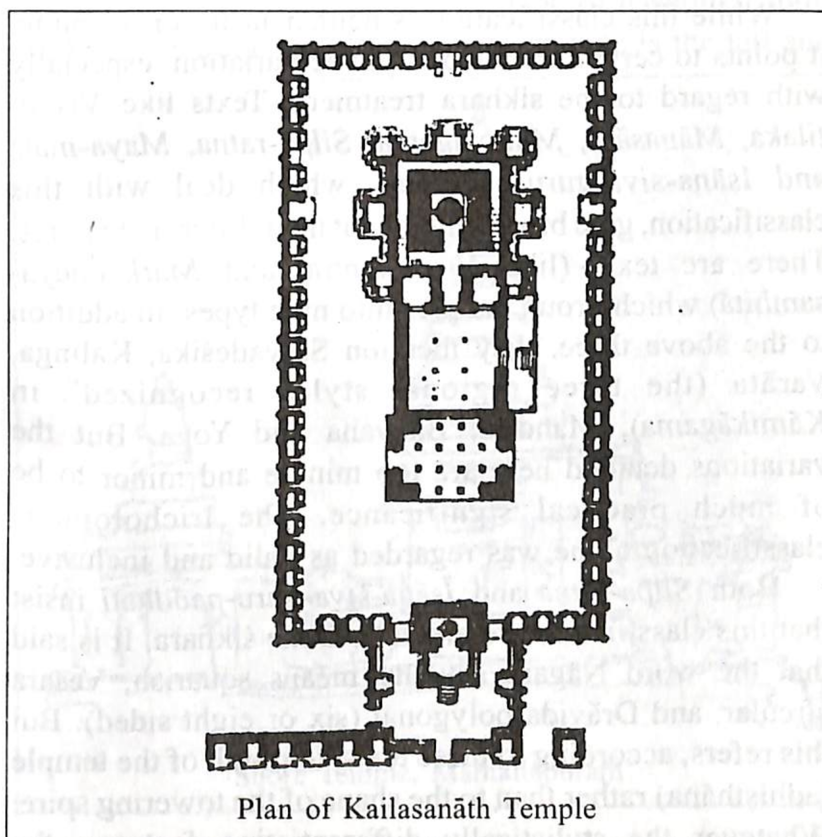
Khakara or wagon-roof type of Temple

king Vikramāditya II. A remarkable, and altogether unprecedented, feature about the Pattadakallu temple is that we have an inscriptional mention of the architect who actually built this structure : 'sūtradhāri' Anivārita-guṇḍa. For the first time in the history of temple-building, the craftsmaster is given his due recognition. The original shrine was probably austere and one-celled, with an imposing although modest śikhara; but it came to have in due course numerous pavalions, it became a complex structure, but not forsaking the dominant element of harmony. We should turn to the Vijayeśvara (now known as Saṅgameśvara) temple, if we want to have an idea of how the original temple would have looked like without a porch. This latter temple was an earlier one, having been built by Vijayāditya (696-733 A.D.).



Kailasanātha temple, Kancipuram

A still earlier temple is the one dedicated to Śiva (or Viṣṇu, according to Percy Brown), Pāpanātha, with a short tower of the North Indian type. An obvious and bold disregard of the canonical proportions characterizes this temple, which was constructed before 690 A.D. A narrow circumambulatory passage, a disproportionately large vestibule, greatly spread out pillars, and the hesitantly low vimāna make the temple closer to the rock-cut shrines than to the structural ones. In the half-pavilion (ardha-mandapa), structurally removed from the main shrine, is sculptured a fine Natarāja group. The sculptor's name



Plan of Kailasanāth Temple

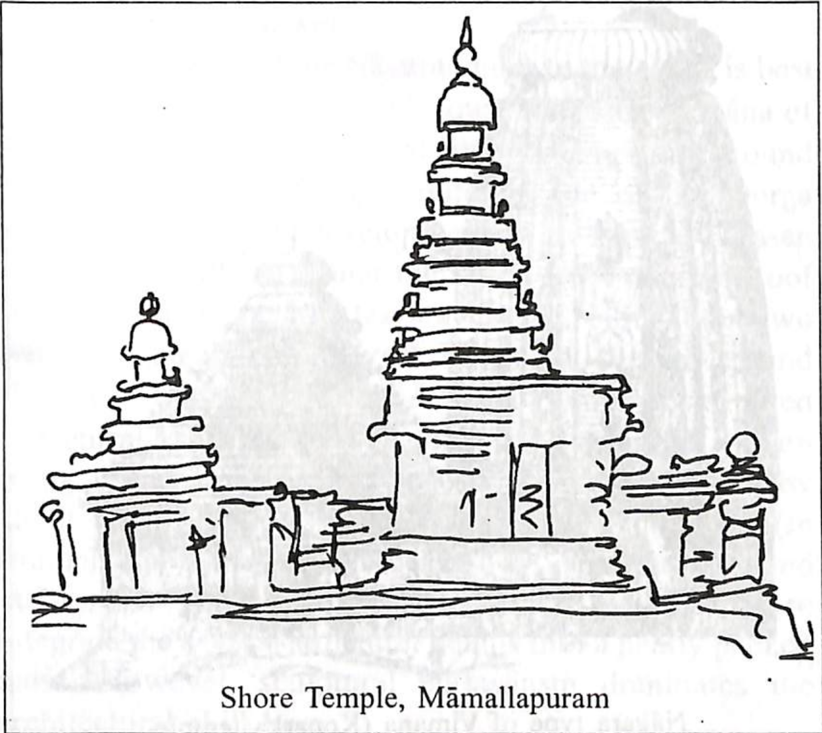
(Baladevamayya) is inscribed on the panel near the left shoulder of the main figure.

The temple-complex of the Cālukyas of Bādāmi, scattered in Bādāmi, Aihole, Pattadakallu, Kopana, Puligere and Vakkunda, marks an important phase in the evolution of temple architecture in India. It not only marks a definite transition from the rock-cut shrines to structural temples, but it reveals numerous experiments in stylistic variation. Here, perhaps, was the origin of the classical trichotomous classification of Indian temples into Nāgara, Drāvida and Vesara.

While this classification is neither neat nor absolute, it points to certain trends of stylistic variation, especially with regard to the sikhara treatment. Texts like *Viṣnu-tilaka, Mānasāra, Mukutāgama, Silpa-ratna, Maya-mata and Isāna-siva-guru-pad-dhati,* which deal with this classification, give broad hints about their differing features. There are texts (like *Viṣnu-tantra,* and *Mārkandeya-samhitā*) which group temples into nine types; in addition to the above three, they mention Sārvadeśika, Kalinga, Varāta (the three regional styles recognized". in *Kāmikāgama*), Mandira, Bhavana and Yoga. But the variations detailed here are too minute and minor to be of much practical significance. The trichotomous classification alone was regarded as valid and inclusive.

Both *Silpa-ratna* and *Īsāna-śiva-guru-paddhati* insist that this classification refers only to the śikhara. It is said that the word Nāgara actually means squarish, Vesara circular, and Drāvida polygonal (six or eight sided). But this refers, according to these texts, to plinth of the temple (adhiṣṭhāna) rather than to the shape of the towering spire: Whatever the stylistically differentiating features, the

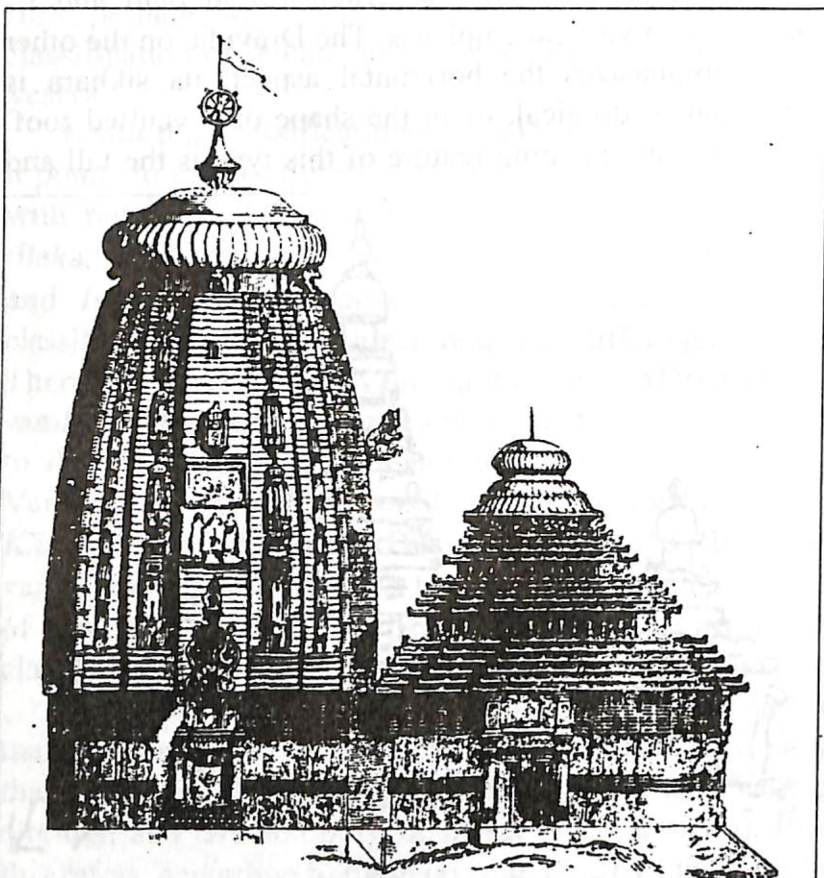
territorial grouping is also done in the texts. The classical description is that the Nāgara type prevails in the land between the Himālayas and Vindhyā ran ges, the Vesara between the Vindhyā ranges and the river Kṛiṣnā, and the Drāviḍa in the country between that river and Kanyākumārī. There is also a variant description, denoting the Southern style (between Kṛiṣnā and Kanyākumārī) as Vesara and the Central style (between Vindhyā and Krisnā) as Drāviḍa. The significance of Vesara is that it is a mixed style. The Nāgara temple is square or cruciform in plan and its sikhara has a vertical emphasis. The Drāviḍa, on the other hand, emphasizes the horizontal aspect; its sikhara is octogonal or domical, or in the shape of a vaulted roof. Another distinguishing feature of this type is the tall and



Shore Temple, Māmallapuram

storeyed towers on gate-ways (gopuras); but this is a later innovation. The Vesara is circular in plan or apsidal and combines the sikhara-features of the other two types.

The temples built by the Cāḷukyas of Bādāmi are said to conform more or less to the Vesara typology, but we find examples of the other two types also. In fact, the textual incorporation of these types must have followed the actual construction of these temples. The tendency to emphasize the element of tower over the sanctum is



Nāgara type of Vimana (Konarka temple

monumental and structural temples which we see initiated in the Paṭṭadakallu complex found their fulfillment in both North Indian and South Indian temples. Two fine and early examples of the typical and stylized South Indian Drāviḍa treatment of the tower are the Shore-temple at Māmal-lapuram and Kailāśanātha temple at Kāñcīpuram, both built by the Pallava-ruler Narasiṁhavarman II (also called Rājasiṁha, about 680-720 A.D.).. It is probable that the Virūpākṣa temple at Paṭṭadakallu was directly influenced by them. But stylistic variations have been tried out here. The Gaḷaganātha temple has the tall śikhara with the āmalaka motif, which undoubtedly was the forerunner of the typical spiral Nāgara type. Likewise, the Visvesvara temple provided the model for the characteristic Kalyāṇa-Cāḷukya tower.

The transition of the Nāgara idiom to the North is best illustrated by the early, broad, squatty and low vimāna of the Paraśurāmeśvara temple of Bhuvaneśvar (built around 750 A.D.), which strongly, reminds one of the Durgā temple at Aihoḷe. Its development into a typical Orissan style with a tall tower and the tiered front pavilion roof can be seen in the Muktesvara temple, built about two centuries later and the great Lingarāja Temple around 1000 A.D. in the same town. A variant idiom was evolved in Central India, with preference for pyramidal śikhara rising on an elevated masonry terrace, as illustrated by about twenty temples that are extant in Khajurāho (in Bundelkhaṇḍ, Madhya Pradesh) built between 950 and 1050 A.D. These temples also reveal a tendency to integrate the several structural details into a neatly packed mass. However, sculptural enthusiasm dominates the architectural skill here.

THE TEMPLE STRUCTURE

The Indian temple is not a building ; it is an image, a conception of divinity. While it is both natural and necessary for the image to be projected into a spatial arrangement and concretized by a structural monument, the image does not depend upon such activities for it continuance. It is true that the urge for the expression of the image has grown from a simple ring of stones to a vast complex of shrines, chapels, pavilions, corridors, yards, and tanks. It is also true that sometimes townships have grown inside the temple enclosures; and the administrative machinery in many cases is elaborate and involved. But the basic truth about the temple is the image that people have, and this centers round the icon. The icon is the source of the image; and the image may reach far out.

It is not impossible to conceive of an icon devoid of the temple paraphernalia. In fact, it is not till a late period in the history of Indian religion that the temple as a distinct socio-religious institution began. Early shrines were probably confined to the icons. The custom of building the temple first and then preparing an icon to be installed in it is a later one. According to strict canonical considerations, a temple must be built for the icon, and not an icon got ready for the temple, for a temple is really only an outgrowth of the icon, an image of the icon.

It is impossible to indicate when exactly the custom of building stylized temples began in our country. There is hardly a structural shrine that can reach back to the third or even the fourth century A.D. But temples must have been there much earlier. The village shrines of thatch and

mud, bamboo and wood would not have been meant to survive till our days. The builders of such shrines had no eye for abiding fame. They did not aspire that their buildings should last "till the sun and the moon and stars cease shining", as the later kings and chieftains vaingloriously wanted. Early constructions were not instruments of vanity or even acts of piety, but necessary means of worship.

There is evidence to suppose that the early shrines were temporary structures, erected when the occasion of community-worship demanded, and were pulled down later. The canonical concept of 'pavilion' (maṇḍapa) supports this supposition. The old text *Viśvakarma-prakāśa* suggests that the purpose of the pavilion is to accommodate the people that gather to participate in the worship ritual. People gather to worship at the temple only occasionally. Every house had its own shrine, and daily worship would be conducted there. Two kinds of shrines are recognized; 'private' shrines, meant for the individual devotee and for his family (ātmārtha); and 'public', meant for all the people in the community (parārtha). In the former case the performers and the participants are not different, whereas in the latter the priests are the performers and people are the participants. The sanctum of the public shrine would be for the performance of the worship ritual, and the pavilions for the participants to assemble and partake of the proceedings. Temporary structures would be put up when large groups of participants are expected to gather.

It is only later that such structures tended to become more permanent, and the early stimulus came probably from the Indo-Greeks who became converts to Indian

religions. We have inscriptions that reveal their influence. Heliodorus (son of Dion), the Indo-Greek ambassador who resided in the city of Takṣa-silā around the second century B.C., was a devotee of Viṣṇu, a 'bhāgavata', and got erected a stone column in honour of "Vāsudeva, the god of gods (deva-deva)". An inscription in Brāhmī characters on this garuḍa-dhvaja, found in Besnagar (the old Vidiśā) near the present-day Bhilsā near Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, suggests the existence of some sort of a temple. An inscription belonging to the same period speaks of "an excellent temple (prāsāda) dedicated to Bhagavān". The Śaka satrap, Rājūvala, son of Shoḍāśa, who styled himself "the great satrap' (maha- kṣatrapa), tells us in an inscription found in Mora near Mathurā (Uttar Pradesh) that he got built a stone temple for the icons representing five great heroes of the "Vṛṣṇi clan' (bhagavatām vṛṣṇīnām pañca-vīrāṇām pratimāh śaila-deva-gri.......).

The five great ones constitute the family of Vāsudeva, the form of Viṣṇu extolled in the Bhāgavata cult: Vāsudeva, Saṁkarśaṇa, Pradyumna, Aniruddha, and Sāṁba. The first two of these heroes, identified with Kṛiṣṇa-viṣṇu and his brother Bala-rāma (who was later merged in the concept of Kārtikeya-subrahmaṇya) appear to have been popular divinities during the days prior to the Christian era. There is another second century B.C. inscription found at Ghosuṇḍi (Nagarī near Chittor in Rājāsthān), which speaks of a "stone temple-enclosure with a garden dedicated to Nārāyaṇa" (pūjāśilāprakāra-nārāyaṇa-vāṭikā) meant for the worship of "the unconquered heroes and lords of all, Vāsudeva and Saṁkarśaṇa" (anihatābhyām sarveśvarābhyām Vāsudeva-Saṁkar-śaṇābhyām).

What these temples were like is hard to conjecture. It is not even certain that they were temples in the present-day sense; they may have been mere enclosures around an icon. Icons were older than temples. We know, for instance, that the celebrated temple on the top of the Tirumala hills (in Andhra Pradesh) was not there during the days of the early Āḷvārs, the Vaiṣṇava saints of the South, viz., the third and fourth centuries A.D. Their Tamiḷ, songs describe the majestic Beṅgaḍam icon as free-standing and exposed to sunshine and rain; there was only a dwarf rampart enclosing the icon. The famous five-foot icon of Śiva (?) found at Guḍimallam (near Beṇiguṇṭa, in North Arcot district) has been assigned by Ānanda Coomaraswamy to the first century B.C. It is likely that this icon also was free-standing. We have from the village Burhikhār (in Bilāspur district, Madhya Pradesh) an inscribed sculpture of the same period (first century B.C.), worshipped as "Catur-bhuji Bhagavāh' (four-armed Viṣṇu) and gifted by some lady Prajāvāti. There is, however, no mention of a temple having been there to house it.

The Purāṇas, which are medieval works, contain not only praises of temples but promise great glory to the builders of temples. *Agni-purāṇa,* for instance, says that if a person merely desires to build a temple for Viṣṇu, all the sins that he had accumulated during all his previous lives would disappear. *Haya-śīrśa* proclaims that if one should put a brick in place for building a temple and die soon after that act, he would have acquired the benefits of performing a sacrifice. *Viṣṇu-rahasya* promises heaven even for a child that playfully builds a temple in the sands. Such praises and promises suggest that temples had

already been looked upon as acts of great merit, and that temples were being built in large numbers by the rich and pious folk. This activity was encouraged by affirmations that a single temple built would confer merits that one would acquire by performing two sacrifices together, 'Rājasūya' and 'Aśvamedha' (*Viṣṇudhar-mottara*). It was the new substitute for the degenerating tradition of performance of sacrifices.

The early Purāṇas had focussed the religious attention of the country on a few places which were regarded as especially favourite of the gods; the divine presence was supposed to be spontaneous and abundant there. Their celebrity has continued till our own day. Instances are Badarī-vana, Kedāra-nātha, Indra-dyumna (Jagannātha-puri), Kāśī (Banaras), Prayāga, Somanātha, Siṁhādri, Veṅkaṭācala (Tirumalai), Setu (Rameśvaram), Kāñcīpuram. Here the icons were reputed to be 'self-manifest' (svayaṁ-vyakta), not made by man; and therefore what remained for man to do was to build temples over them. And the places themselves were considered holy, and visits to them were held especially meritorious. Pilgrimage, which still remains as one of the essential features of Indian religions, was largely the contribution of the Indian' religions, was largely the contribution of the Purāṇas. The essence of the holy place was concretized in a shrine, often containing the icon that was reputed to be 'self-manifest'. Structural additions to such shrines, buildings to accommodate the pilgrims, tanks to provide water to them, free refectories to cater to their needs, and other acts of charity were deemed meritorious. There are instances where whole townships have grown out of shrines. These are in scriptures called 'independent' (svatantra) shrines, in contradistinction

to the temples built for the sake of a village or township ('dependent' or paratantra shrines).

This is how vast temple-complexes evolved in hundreds of 'sacred sites' (kṣetras), strewn all over the country. But when places which did not command such Purāṇic prestige emerged into importance owing to political or commercial reasons, they were also got sanctified by kings or chieftains or influential residents through the installation of icons were brought over from the ancient, sacred sites which had been deserted or which were not easily accessible to people. The conquering kings sometimes carried away prestigious icons as booty and got them set up in their own capitals. Or, more frequently, replicas of icons from the accreditedly sacred sites were got made and installed. There are for instance hundreds of Kāśi-Viśvanātha temples in the country today, and hundreds of Kedāreśvara shriṇes; Veṅkaṭeśvara shrines have sprung up in large numbers after the original shrine at Tirumalai.

Thus, not only architects but sculptors got busy during the middle ages. And to fulfil the new need several texts prescribing the norms, styles, methods and measurements of the temples and icons came to be written. Craft-guilds were organized, and kings and chieftains undertook to be patrons of artists and craftsmen connected with temple building. Craftsmen's organization was in terms of four classes of skilled workers: the designing architect (sthapati), the surveyor (sūtragrāhin), the sculptor (takṣaka), and the builder (vardhaki). The architect directed and co-ordinated the activities of others; he was in general required to have an expert acquaintance with the canonical norms. The surveyor was hierarchically next to the architect; his special area of work concerned with proportions, vertical

and horizontal (māna and unmāna). The sculptor worked with stones, cut them into large and small pieces according to plan and design; he also sculpted images and attended to decorations. He was free to work as his fancy dictated, within the general framework provided by the architect. He was acquainted with canonical prescriptions and descriptions concerning icons and sculptural ornamentation, and his creativity was not only acknowledged but praised. The builder put the pieces, cut and worked by the sculptor together, and attended to the temple coming up (the term vardhakī means 'an increaser'). His professional affiliation was with the carpenter's craft. It may be remembered that early temples were constructions in wood, and carpenters were the main craftsmen who attended to them. The work of all these four classes of artisans was often supervised by the director or manager sthāpaka and sthānika) who was not only learned in temple-craft but a priest as well; he was the administrative chief of the temple who had control over the other priests who were directly responsible for the details of worship in the temple.

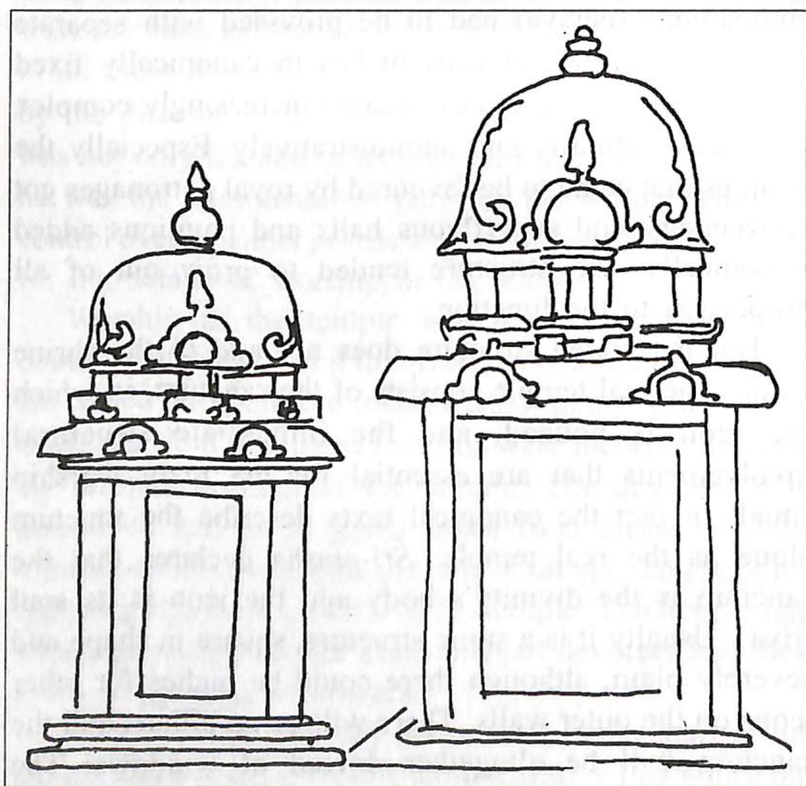
Worship in the temple was more formalized than domestic worship and it involved many more details than the latter. It therefore necessitated many priests and assistants. And numerous festivals were incorporated into the normal working of the temple. The devotees who assembled had to be given token food blessed by the offering-rituals (naivedya, prasāda or bhoga); and in olden days pilgrims were also fed in the temple. The temple had also to provide place for assemblies of devotees and their socio- religious performances.

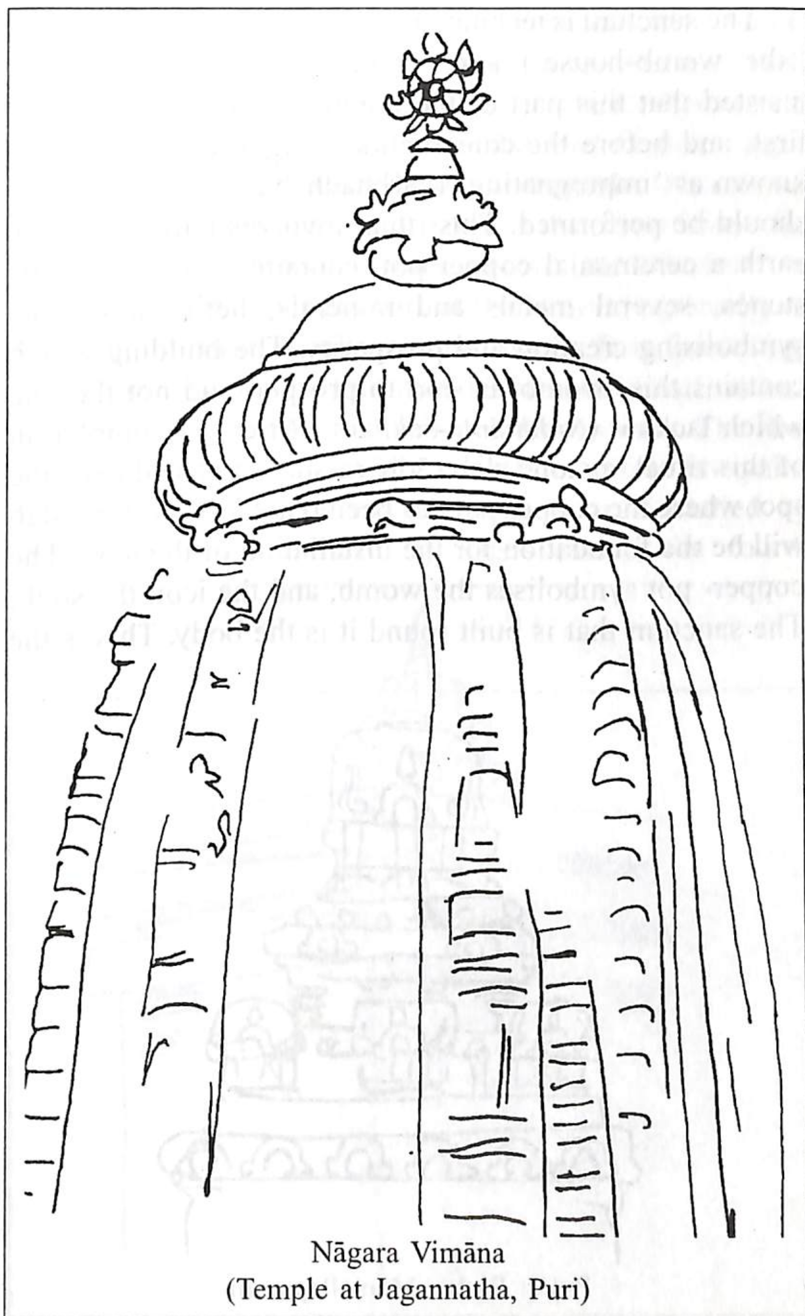
All this meant not only an increase in the staff of the temple and a more elaborate administrative procedure but

a growth in the spatial arrangement. The temple had to have several halls, not strictly connected with the routine worship: audience pavilion (raṅgamaṇḍapa), treasury and store-house (Śrī-bhaṅḍāra), the chamber for the performance of daily and occasional sacrifices (yāga-śālā), kitchen (pāka-śālā), dining hall (Śiva-kūṭa in Śaivite temples and Rāmānuja-kūṭa in Vaiṣṇavite temples in the South, bhoga-maṇḍapa in the North), marriage-hall (kalyāṇa- maṇḍapa), the rooms where the festival-vehicles were kept (vāhana-maṇḍapa), and the temple-tank (kalyāṇi or teppa-koḷam in the South). And in addition to the main icon in the sanctum, several other icons in the nature of consorts (Amman or Devi), attendants (parivāra), and companions (pārśva) had to be provided with separate chambers, cells or at least niches in canonically fixed positions. The temple thus became increasingly complex both architecturally and administratively. Especially the temples that came to be favoured by royal patronages got unnecessary and superfluous halls and pavilions added periodically; the structure tended to grow out of all proportion to the function.

But the added structure does not add to the shrine value. The real temple consists of the sanctum, in which the icon is housed, and the immediate structural involvements that are essential for the main worship ritual. In fact the canonical texts describe the sanctum alone as the real temple. *Śrī-praśha* declares that the sanctum is the divinity's body and the icon is its soul (jīva). Usually it is a stone structure, square in shape and severely plain, although there could be niches for other icons on the outer walls. There will be no pillars, and the sanctum will be altogether devoid of windows. The

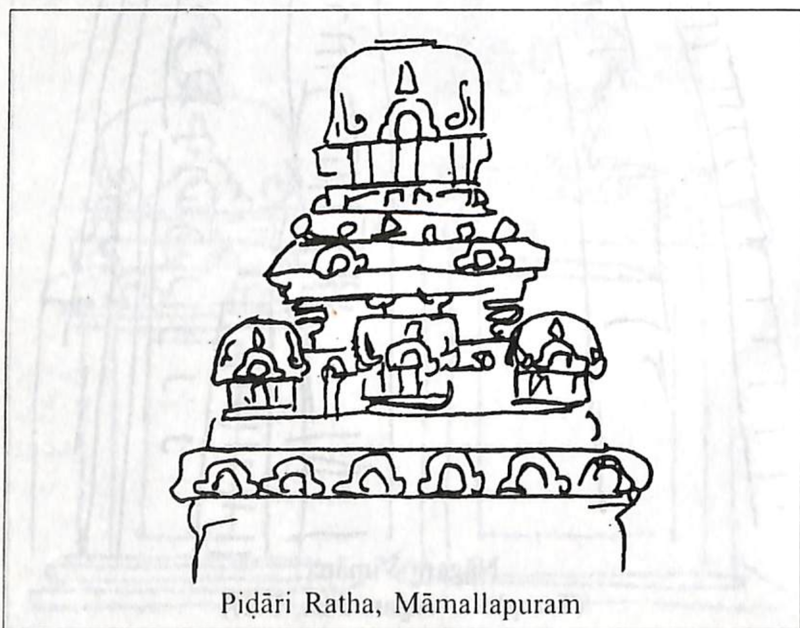
shutting off of air and light was meant to preserve the icon which, in olden days, was made of wood, stucco, or even clay. Besides preventing the ill-effects of weathering, the dark interior added to the mystery of the divine presence in the sanctum represented by an empty low platform (vedi, probably with a mystic diagram called maṇḍala), a copper vessel placed on a seat (kuṁbha), a sacrificial fireplace (kuṇḍa) or a sculpted icon (biṁba). Although it is usual to find the sanctum built in stone, constructions in brick are not rare. *Viṣṇu-tilaka* mentions that while the stone sanctum is the best, the brick one is the next best; the wooden sanctum however is inferior, and the mud one is said to be the worst.





Nāgara Vimāna
(Temple at Jagannatha, Puri)

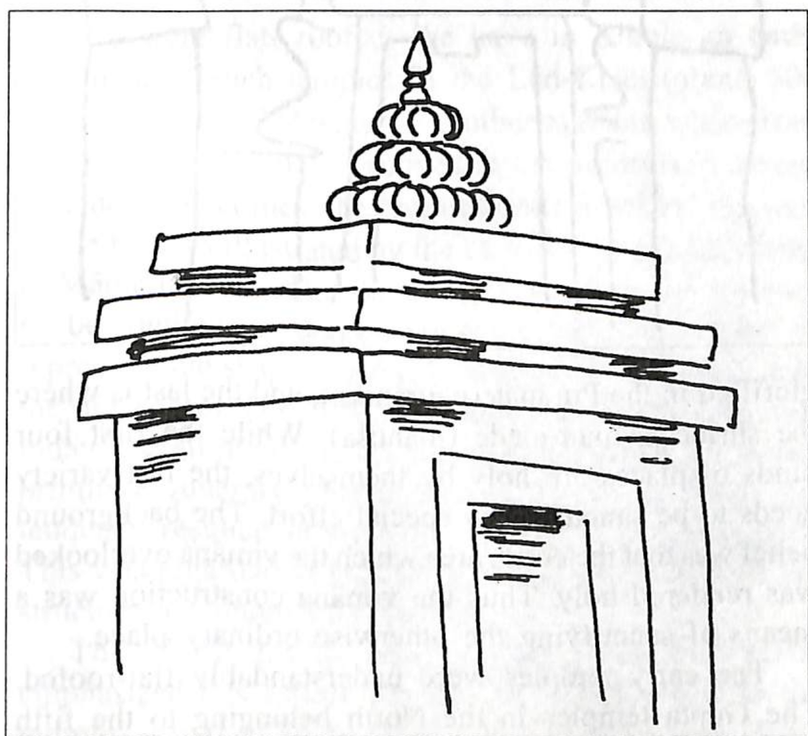
The sanctum is technically known as the 'garbha-gṛha' ('the womb-house') and 'Deul' (in the North). It is insisted that this part of the temple must be constructed first, and before the construction a significant ceremony known as 'impregnating' (garbhādhāha or garbha-nyāsa) should be performed. This ritual involves letting into the earth a ceremonial copper pot, containing nine precious stones, several metals and minerals, herbs and soils, symbolising creation and prosperity. The building which contains this 'womb' is said to prosper, and not the one which lacks it (*Siddhānta-śekhara*). After the completion of this ritual, a stone slab (ādhāra-śila) is placed over the spot where the copper pot has been buried. This stone slab will be the foundation for the installation of the icon. The copper- pot symbolises the womb, and the icon the soul.. The sanctum that is built round it is the body. This is the

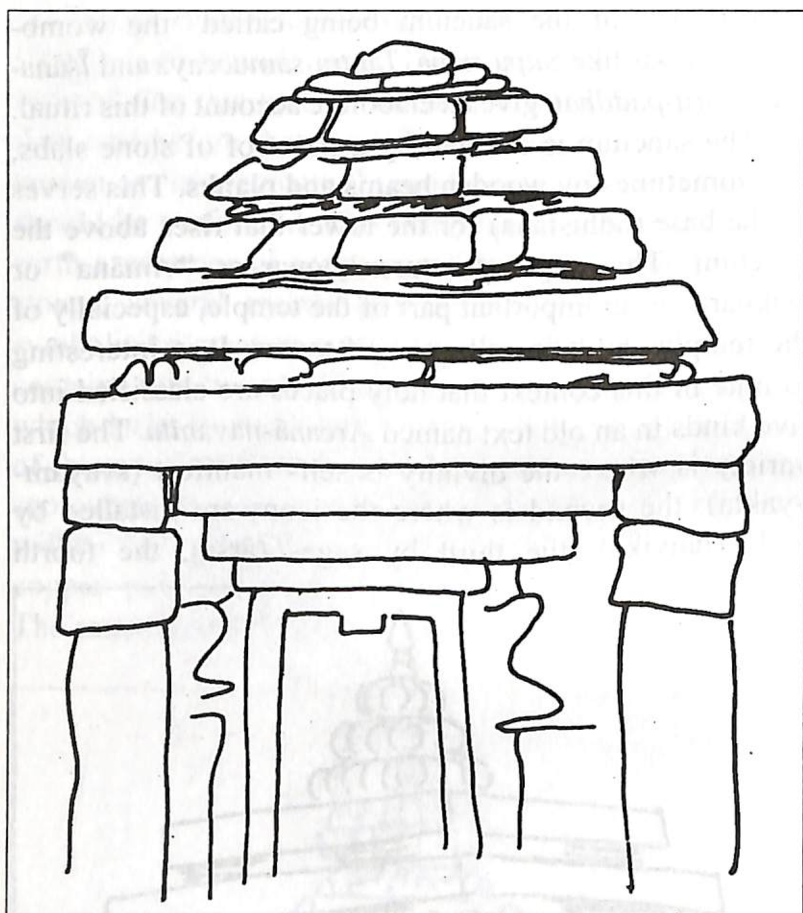


Piḍāri Ratha, Māmallapuram

significance of the sanctum being called 'the womb-house'. Texts like *Śilpa-ratna, Tantra-samuccaya* and *Īśāna-śiva-guru-paddhati* give an elaborate account of this ritual.

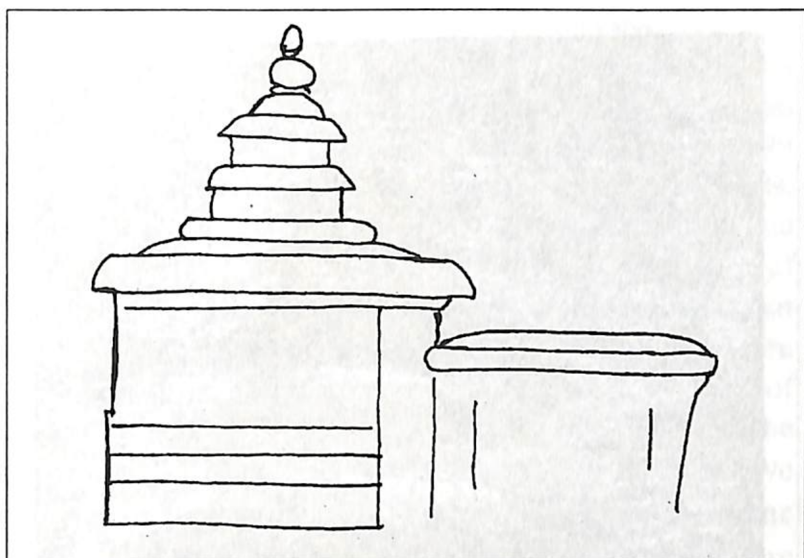
The sanctum is covered by a flat roof of stone slabs, and sometimes by wooden beams and planks. This serves as the base (adhiṣṭāna) for the tower that rises above the sanctum. This super-structure known as "vimāna" or "śikhara" is an important part of the temple, especially of the temples built in villages and towns. It is interesting to note in this context that holy places are classified into five kinds in an old text named *Arcanā-navanīta*. The first variety is where the divinity is self- manifest (svayaṁ-vyakta), the second is where the icons are installed by gods (daivika), the third by sages (ārśa), the fourth





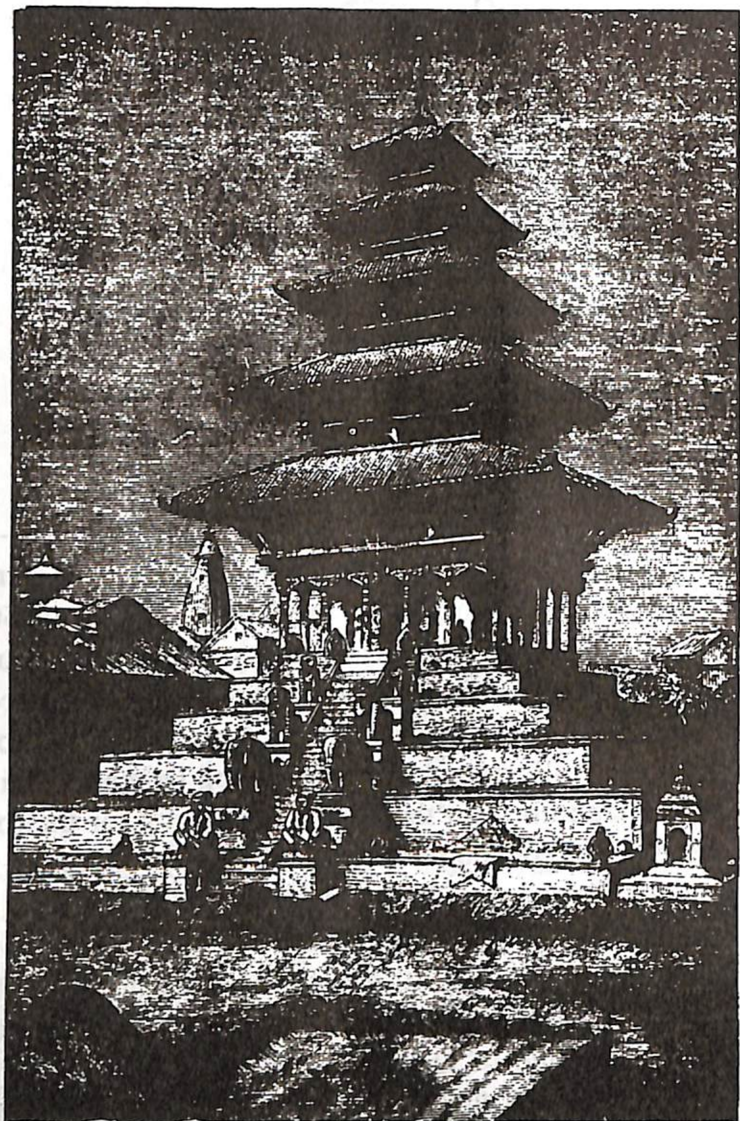
glorified in the Purāṇas (paurāṇika), and the last is where the shrine is man-made (mānuśa). While the first four kinds of places are holy by themselves, the last variety needs to be sanctified by special effort. The background belief was that the entire area which the vimāna overlooked was rendered holy. Thus the vimāna construction was a means of sanctifying the otherwise ordinary place.

The early temples were understandably flat-roofed. The Gupta temples in the North belonging to the fifth



century were flat- roofed. We have in Aihoḷe an early specimen of such temples in the Lāḍ-Khān (about 500 A.D.), on the roof of which is another sanctum whose roof consists of stone slabs grooved at the points and pieced together. Sometimes, the temple roof resembled the roof of the huts, as illustrated by the so-called Draupadī shrine in Māmallapuram. But there was a tendency for the roof to be vaulted or dome-shaped, probably in order to reproduce the shape of the cave-shrines or in imitation of the stūpa-form. The mean mud-shrines in the villages even today are surmounted by a mound of earth, as in the primitive funerary monument. In course of time, the tendency resulted in the pyramidal or curvilinear form. This was regarded as the part of the temple that gave the structure a monumental dignity.

The North Indian temples, especially in Orissa, emphasized this aspect. Perhaps the upper storey of the temple (as in the Lāḍ-Khān temple of Aihoḷe) was stylized



Devī Shrine
at Bhātgaon (Nepal)

into this part; and several storeys were amalgamated into a decorative spire. By about the eighth century, the towers became parabolic in character. Legends about the mythical mountain Sumeru (or Meru) were employed to highlight the value of the tall towers that rose to impressive heights. Indeed some of the temple-complexes in Orissa and Khajurāho appear like mountain ranges. The vimānȧ of the Liṅgarāja temple in Bhuvaneśvar is 125 feet tall; that of the Jagannāth temple at Puri is 200 feet tall, and can be seen from a distance of six miles. In the temples of North India, the main sanctuary comprehending the sanctum (garbha-gṛha or deul) as well as the tower above it is called the vimāna (or śikhara). Although the same connotation obtained in the South, it has become more usual to confine the expression to the superstructure above the sanctum.

The North Indian vimāna is crowned by a large circular (wheel- shaped) capstone block known as āmalaka, after the common fruit embolic myrobelan; while its South Indian counterpart ends in a cupola (śṛṅga) or wagon-roof (khakhara). The South Indian vimāna is broader and shorter than the North Indian one, and we find the usual tendency is towards the form of a polygon, on a square or rectangular plan. The North Indian temples rise from a pedestal (pīṭha) through the wall (bara) and main body (gaṇḍi) to the "head" (mastaka), which consists of a ribbed āmalaka surmounted by a 'skull' (khapuri), on which is installed the kalaśa (the finial). And on top of the finial will be seen the 'weapon' (āyudha) of the deity, a trident or a discus.

In South India, there was emphasis on the vimāna in the earlier phase of temple architecture. For instance, the

vimāna of the Rājarājiśvara (or the so called Bṛihadeśvara) temple at Tāñjāvūr in Tamiḷ Nāḍu (built by the Coḷa King Rājarāja I, and consecrated in 1009 A.D.) rises to a height of 58 metres, "an architectural texture of great beauty". But the tendency was in favour of shorter vimānas. For example, the vimāna of the temple at Gaṅgaikoṇḍa-coḷa-puram (built by Rajendra-Coḷa in 1025 A.D.) was already only 46 metres high. Subsequent vimānas are less emphasized in their height, in comparison with the tower over the gateway (dvāra-gopura). But the sanctity of the vimāna was not affected by the diminished height. While sculpture on the gateway-tower could contain secular and erotic themes, the vimāna had to be austere and could accommodate only the prescribed divinities, associated with the icon in the sanctum. The practice of bowing to the vimāna as if that were verily the outer form of the icon continues even today among the devout folk. The gateway-tower, on the other hand, does not command this reverence. It is more a creature of the donor's pomp and the sculptor's skill than an expression of religious sentiment.

The plan of the vimāna could be round or square: it could also be six-sided or eight sided. It could either retain one form uniformly from its base to the top, or combine two or more plans at different levels. It consisted originally of several distinct storeys, sometimes as many as sixteen, but the prevailing style is devoid of such differentiation into storeys. It rises directly above the sanctum, with the flat roof of the sanctum (bhūmikā or kapota) as its base (adhiṣṭhāna). Sometimes, however, it encompasses the area covered by the circumambulatory path round the sanctum as well as the rectangular porch immediately in front of the sanctum. Its mass rests on a square base, called

'support' (adhiṣṭhāna or pīṭha), and rises through stylized treatment of dormer-windows in several tiers to a dome-shaped tower (śikhara) surmounted by a cupola (śṛṅga or stūpī).

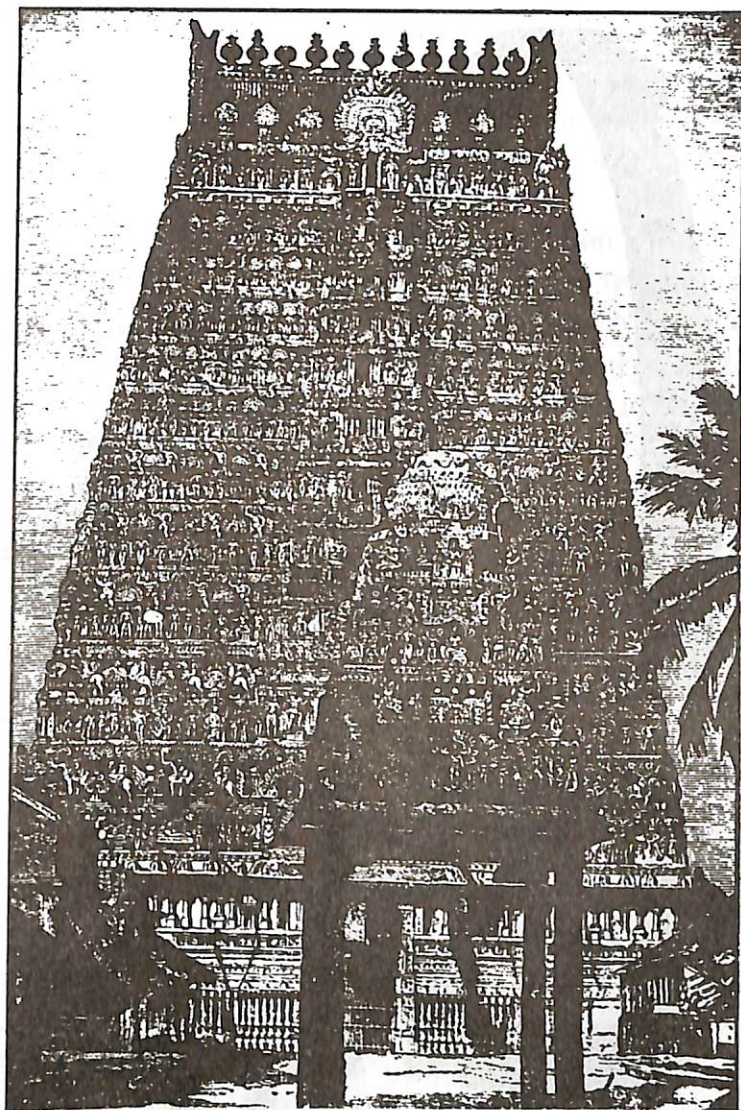
Allround the sanctum will be a passage, often narrow, permitting the devotees to pass round the sanctum in the customary act of devotion. This circumambulatory path (pradakṣiṇā-patha or bhrama) became a structural involvement as the temple grew in size; it is more naturally open, as it was in the early phase. The rectangular porch in front of the sanctum (mukha-maṇḍapa or mukha śālā) is a pillared hall, allowing the devotees to stand and watch the worship rituals as they are conducted inside the sanctum. When the temple became popular and the participants increased in number, there was need for an additional hall of considerable dimensions (nava-raṅga or mahā-maṅḍapa) to accommodate large assemblies. In such an event, the porch became merely a 'vestibule' (antarāla), structurally connecting the sanctum with the assembly-hall. This intermediary space was open in the early temples, as for instance it was in the Veṅkaṭeś-vara temple on the Tirumalai hills. But it tended to become a closed hall resting on pillars as the fortunes of the temple prospered.

The area of the temple comprising of the sanctum and the halls as well as the tanks and garden came to be enclosed by a wall (prākāra), like the ramparts of a fort. But this was a later innovation, and became an especial feature of South Indian temples. Later canonical texts provide for as many as thirty-two such concentric and enclosing walls, but recommend not more than five or seven, although the need to have more than one was rarely

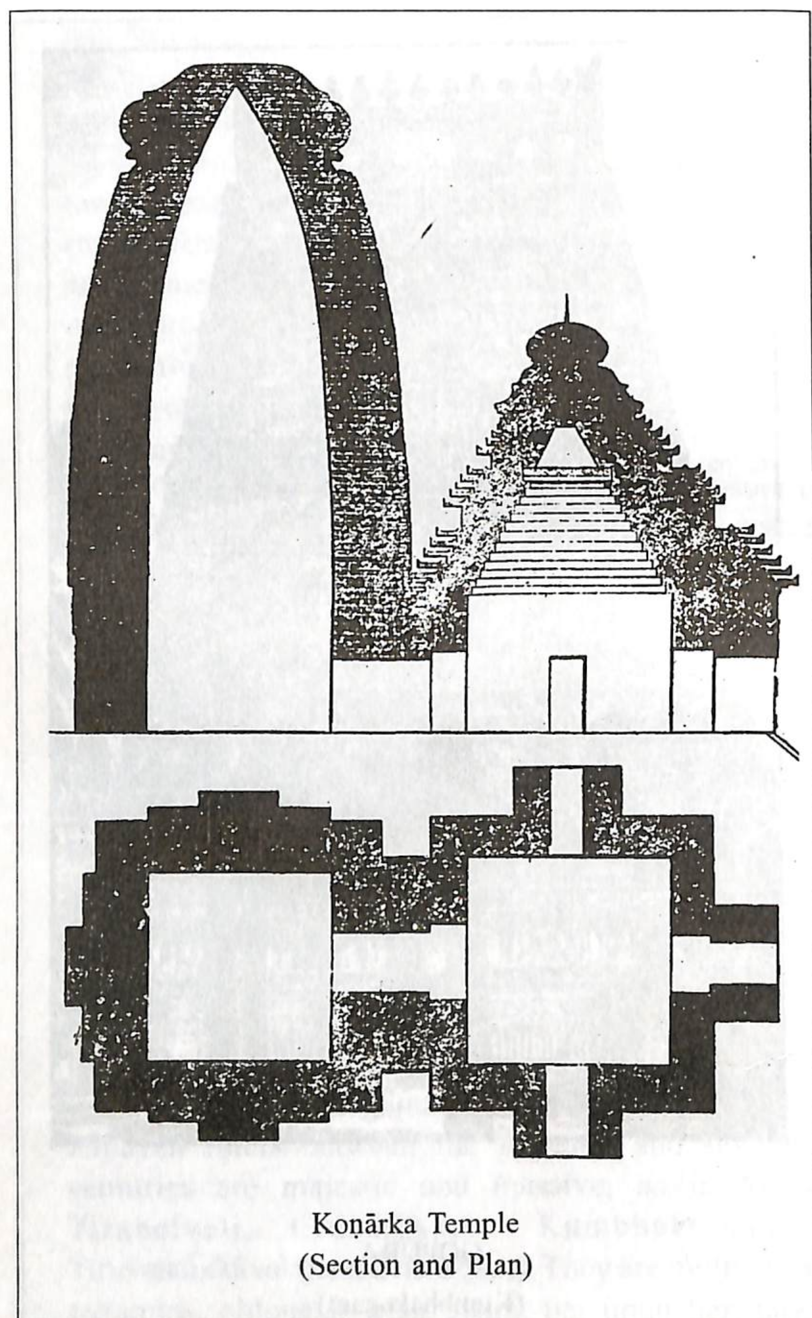
felt. The Raṅganātha temple at Śrīraṅgam in Tamiḷ Nāḍu has seven enclosing walls, encompassing almost the entire township. Where there are multiple walls, the one nearest to the sanctum is styled as 'the inner enclosure' (antarmaṇḍapa) and the outermost as "the limiting lines' (maryādāhāra). In the South Indian temples the prākāras are not merely boundary walls; they accommodate a series of pillared halls or pavilions, rooms for storage, resting places for pilgrims, and shrines for minor deities. Although their chief purpose is protection of temple property, the walls are also rendered elegant and artistic.

Although the texts prescribe that each enclosure must have doorways on all four sides, with a tower over each one of them, and although we do find large temples (such as the one in Tiruvaṇṇāmalai in Tamiḷ Nāḍu) answering to this prescription, it is commonly the wall facing the sanctum alone that has the opening.

This doorway is called mahā-dvāra, and usually it is an immense one, allowing the temple elephant or small chariot to pass through. Since the tenth century it has become customary to have a tower above the doorway. The ancient texts such a *Vaikhānasāgama, Maya-mata* and *Īśāna-śiva-guru-paddhati* mention the gateway-tower, but do not consider it as important. One of the earliest towers that can be regarded as impressive is on the gateway to the Avani-Kandarpeśvara temple in Kiḷaiyūr (near Tirucci in Tamiḷ Nāḍu). The gopuras built by the later Choḷa and Pāṇḍyan rulers between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries are majestic and massive, as in Madurai, Tirunelveli, Cidaṁbaram, Kumbhakoṇam and Tiruvanaikkāval (near Śrīraṅgam). They are multi-storeyed pyramids, oblong in plan, rising tier upon tier, tapering



GOPURA
(Kumbhakonam)



Koṇārka Temple
(Section and Plan)

till the wagon-roof sikhara with fans (nāsi) on either end representing mythical heads (kīrtimukha) calls a halt. The really tall gopura may reach to the height of about 200 feet. The entire mass, built of brick and mortar, is filled with stucco figures and decorations.

Despite its immensity and artistic profusion, the gopura is not regarded as an essential feature of the temple. And it is unique to the South Indian temples. Neither the enclosing wall (prākāra) nor the gateway-tower (dvāra-gopura) figures prominently in the North Indian temples. And many temple-complexes, as for instance at Khajurāho, are devoid even of the enclosing walls..

The sanctum, which is the most important structural detail, is closely associated with 'the dispensing seat' (bali-pīṭha) which is installed in front of the sanctum directly facing the icon. It is a low stone altar, frequently modelled in the form of a flat lotus in bloom. In the early shrines it is a mere block of stone, but later, it assumed a relatively elaborate form with base, cornices, wall-surface and the top-lotus. Actually there will be several 'seats' of this nature, installed in various ritualistically determined positions inside the enclosure and outside the sanctum. However; the one in front of the sanctum is the "chief seat' (pradhāna-pīṭha), and it is on this that the sculptor spends his skill. The purpose of these seats is to offer food to the attendant and secondary deities, after the main offering has been made in the sanctum. The canons specify that the real temple comprises of the sanctum, the tower on top of it, the icon inside it and "the dispensing seat' in front of it. These are the essential parts of a shrine. Some texts even proclaim that the extent of the shrine reaches only as far as 'the dispensing seat' and no further.

SYMBOLISM

The Upaniṣads speak of the "inverted tree", aśvattha, with roots hidden above and branches spreading below (Kaṭha, 2,3,1). The tree is an ancient analogue of life here and beyond. We find references of it in the *Ṛgveda* itself, and we find it illustrated in the Indus Valley seals. The folk cults are filled with reverential involvements of trees. Trees have been claimed as totems, trees have been worshipped as divinities, and trees have played an important role in our economy. The two trends in the growth of the tree, the normal upward and the spiritual downward, emphasize the principle of complementareity in human life. The Indian temple has not only been associated with trees, but it is in fact a representation of the life-tree. It pictures the principle of complementareity. The sanctum Is a model of the normal tree with roots below and branches above; and the spiral tower of the sanctum symbolizes the inverted tree, with roots above and the spreading branches below.

We have seen that before the sanctum (the 'womb-chamber', garbha-gṛha) is constructed, the ritual of 'impregnation' (or 'depositing womb', garbha-nyāsạ) is gone through. The 'womb' that is deposited in an underground chamber is a consecrated copper-pot containing the essential ingredients of growth and prosperity. It represents the roots of the temple-tree. The sanctum rises above it in distinct tiers : the most fundamental tier is nature itself or the earth (prakrti, in Tamil adippadai), and over it is laid the primary plinth or 'base' (tala), to be covered by the secondary plinth or 'seat' (pīṭha). The three levels of growth are securely

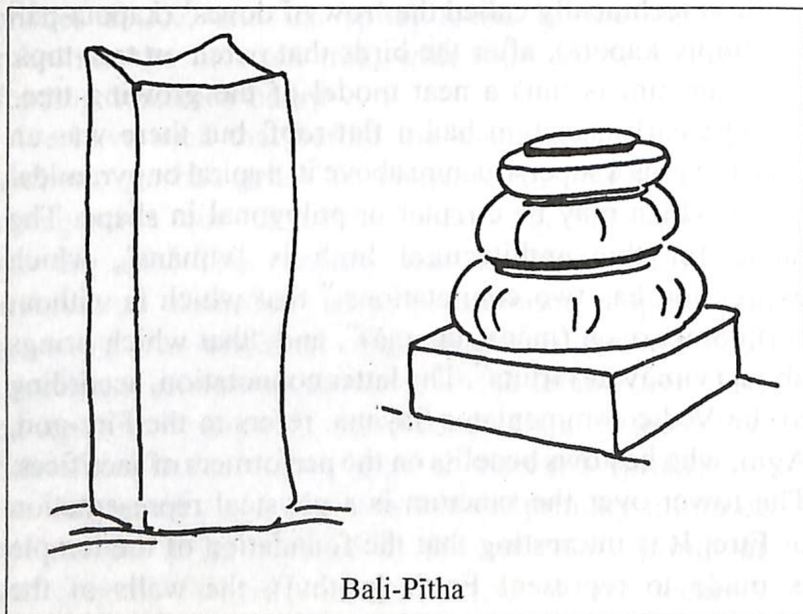
bound by a ritual as well as an engineering device known as 'packing' (bandha). Above this packed surface is laid the 'bed' of the sanctum (adhiṣṭhāna, 'base' or 'support') which is seen as the floor.

Walls rise from the 'bed' on all the four sides. It may be noted that the early sanctums were circular or apsidal in shape. A circle signifies the entire universe, and the sanctum is indeed a model of the universe. The primitive huts were also circular and they were nearer the model of the universe than modern buildings are. When the āgama texts began to look upon the world as being bound by the four directions, they insisted that the shape of the sanctum must be a square, with its opening normally facing the East. The spot where the 'womb' is hidden would be the seat of the icon. The icon represents the sap of the temple-tree, the four walls would indicate the spreading branches allround. The roof resting over the walls is technically called the 'row of doves' (kapota-pāli or simply kapota), after the birds that perch on tree-tops. The sanctum is thus a neat model of the growing tree.

The early sanctum had a flat-roof, but there was an urge towards a superstructure above it, a spiral or pyramidal tower which may be circular or polygonal in shape. The name for this architectural limb is 'vimāna', which expression has two connotations:" that which is without (vi) comparison (māna, upamā)", and "that which brings about (vimāyate) fruits". The latter connotation, according to the Vedic commentator Sāyaṇa, refers to the Fire-god, Agni, who bestows benefits on the performers of sacrifices. The tower over the sanctum is a physical representation of Fire. It is interesting that the foundation of the temple is made to represent Earth (pṛithvī), the walls of the

sanctum Water (āp) and the tower over it Fire (tejas); the finial of the tower stands for Air (vāyu) and above it is the formless Ether (ākāśa). The sanctum is thus a constellation of the five elements that are basic to the entire universe. And Fire being the active element that fuses the others, the tower becomes an important limb in the structure of a temple.

The flat-roof (kapota) of the sanctum on which the tower rests and rises is overlaid by a single square stone slab known in the texts as "the stone denoting the upper passage of life' (brahma-randhra-silā). The sanctum is viewed as the head. Right on top of the head is the passage through which the currents of life ascend to the higher realms. The life of the sanctum ascends to the tower through this stone slab. Around the four comers of this slab are placed the images of the vehicles or emblems that characterize the icon inside the sanctum. If the icon is



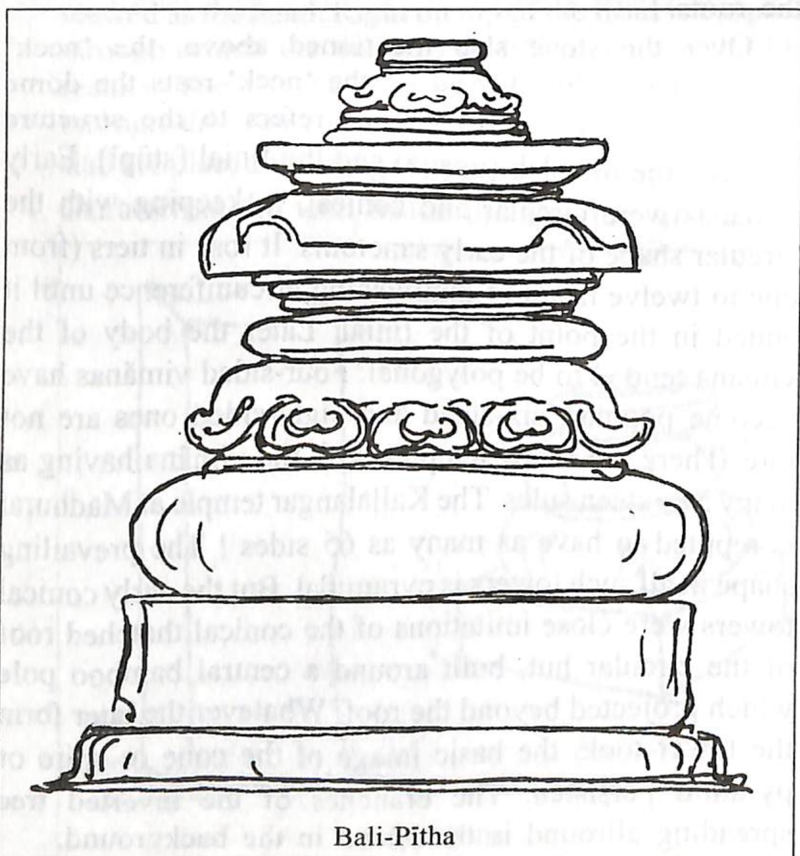
Bali-Pītha

Śiva, bulls are shown; if Śakti lions; if Viṣṇu the sacred eagles (garuḍa) and if Subrahmaṇya peacocks.

The vehicles are normally on a level lower than their owners. What then is the significance of the deities of vehicles above the sanctum ? They act as door-guardians for the icon in the sanctum. But where are the doors there ? Here is an interesting aspect of the tower. The guarding deities stand between the sanctum and the-tower, admitting the forces that descend through the tower into the sanctum. The tower is the inverted tree. The main mass of the tower represents the spreading branches, and the finial above it the roots.

Over the stone slab mentioned above, the 'neck' (grīva) is introduced. And on the 'neck' rests the dome of the tower. The term vimāṇa refers to the structure between the top-slab (upāna) and the finial (stūpī). Early vimānas were circular and conical, in keeping with the circular shape of the early sanctums. It rose in tiers (from one to twelve talas) of diminishing circumference until it ended in the point of the finial. Later the body of the vimāna tended to be polygonal. Four-sided vimānas have become popular; six-sided and eight-sided ones are not rare. There are a few temples with the vimāna having as many as sixteen sides. The Kaḷḷalaṅgar temple at Madhurai is reputed to have as many as 65 sides ! The prevailing shape in all such towers is pyramidal. But the early conical towers were close imitations of the conical thatched roof of the circular hut, built around a central bamboo pole which projected beyond the roof. Whatever the later form the tower took, the basic image of the cone or spire or pyramid persisted. The branches of the inverted tree spreading allround is the vision in the background.

Above the vimāna rests the 'vase' (kalaśa), representing the roots of the inverted tree. Texts mention that the original kalaśa was born as one of the fourteen precious gems that came out of the milky ocean when it was churned: and they suggest that it symbolizes blessing (*Prāsāda-maṇḍana*). The old name for this unit was "kāma-kumbha" or 'the pitcher of desire'. In the architectural development of the Indian temples this feature arrived late, and its arrival appears to be subsequent to the canonical texts. And the early kalasas were probably only stone blocks, round or ribbed. They were in the nature of



Bali-Pītha

cap-stones that held structurally as well as stylistically the vimāna, especially when it was tall and tapering, as in the North Indian temples. The copper vases were later innovations. Sometimes brass was used; opulence and vanity prompted gilded ones. But the āgama books favour copper. The kalaśa is actually a vessel, like the vessel that is deposited under the sanctum. And, like the latter, this also is made to contain tokens of growth and prosperity, viz., cereals with subtle seeds (such as millet) and nine precious stones.

This feature has several members, such as "the foot-hold' (pādagrāhi) which is structurally imbedded in the masonry of the tower, "the egg' (aṇḍa) or the belly, 'the neck' (grīva), 'the lotus-band' (padma-paṭṭikā), 'the rim' (karṇikā), and the 'bud' (bīja-pūra). The shape of this unit could resemble the bell, the flower-bud, the lamp, coconut, altar or pot. The significance of all these shapes is that it symbolizes the potentialities of life.

The ritual of installing the metal vase over the brick and mortar body of the tower is an interesting one. The vase is not bound to the tower by any packing material like mortar or cement. It is only fixed by a hollow rod that juts out of the center of the tower and runs through the vase. It is through this tube that the 'tokens' (cereals and precious stones) are introduced. It is sealed above the body of the kalasa before the "bud" rises.

The body has five limbs : the 'seat' (pīṭha) in the form of a lotus flower whose petals open out completely; the 'neck' on which the bulging out 'pot' (kuṁbha), which is the next limb, rests; the 'brim' or lid for the 'pot'; the 'flower' which opens upward; and finally the 'flower' bud which tapers off to a point. The 'bud' is actually the

central part of the flower whose peripheral petals are separated. It signifies new life and growth. The kalaśa has an important hidden component, viz. "the golden person; (suvarṇa-puruṣa), who is regarded as the very soul of the temple. The belly of the kalaśa is made to contain a tiny cot made in silver, copper or sandal-wood, over which is laid on a soft-feather mattress the golden icon of this 'person', with one hand holding a lotus flower over the heart and the other carrying a triple-flag. Four little pots made in gold, silver or copper, and containing consecrated water are placed on the four sides of the cot. Near the recumbent 'person' is kept a golden or silver pot filled with ghee. The procedure of introducing this 'golden person' into the body of the kalaśa is known as 'hṛdaya-varṇaka-vidhi'. It is described in detail in such texts as *Aparājita-paripriccā* and *Dīpārnava;*

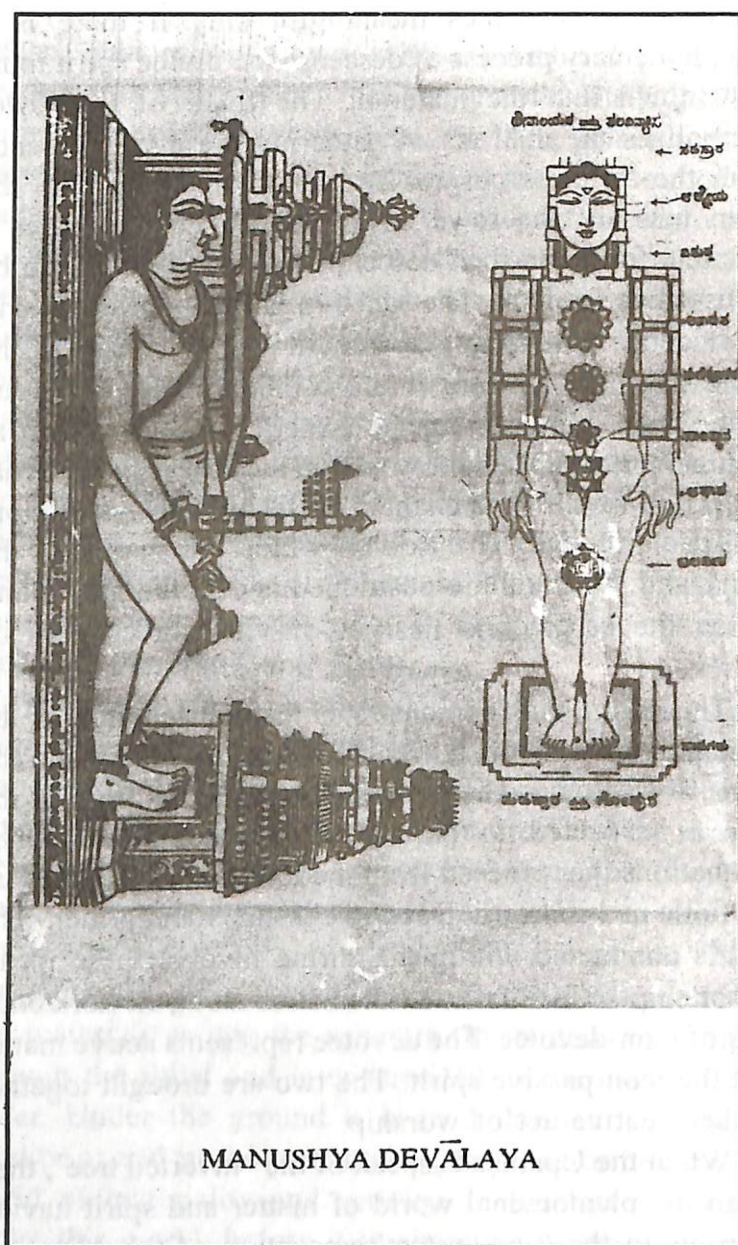
The entire structure of the kalaśa thus represents the roots of the inverted tree. It bears a correspondence with the "womb" under the sanctum. Both are roots, the latter having the upward growth of ordinary tree, and the former the downward growth of the inverted tree. The 'womb', the icon and the finial are structurally collinear and run along the same axis of divine consciousness. This consciousness in its ascent transforms itself into the icon, and materializes into the sanctum. In its descent, it runs through the finial and is concretized as the mass of the tower. Under the ground it is in a dormant, nebulous condition; and in the sanctum it gets transformed into a world of materiality and activity. In the tower it rises above this world, before it is absorbed In the universal consciousness at the peak of the finial.

Man's approach is one of ascent of matter towards the

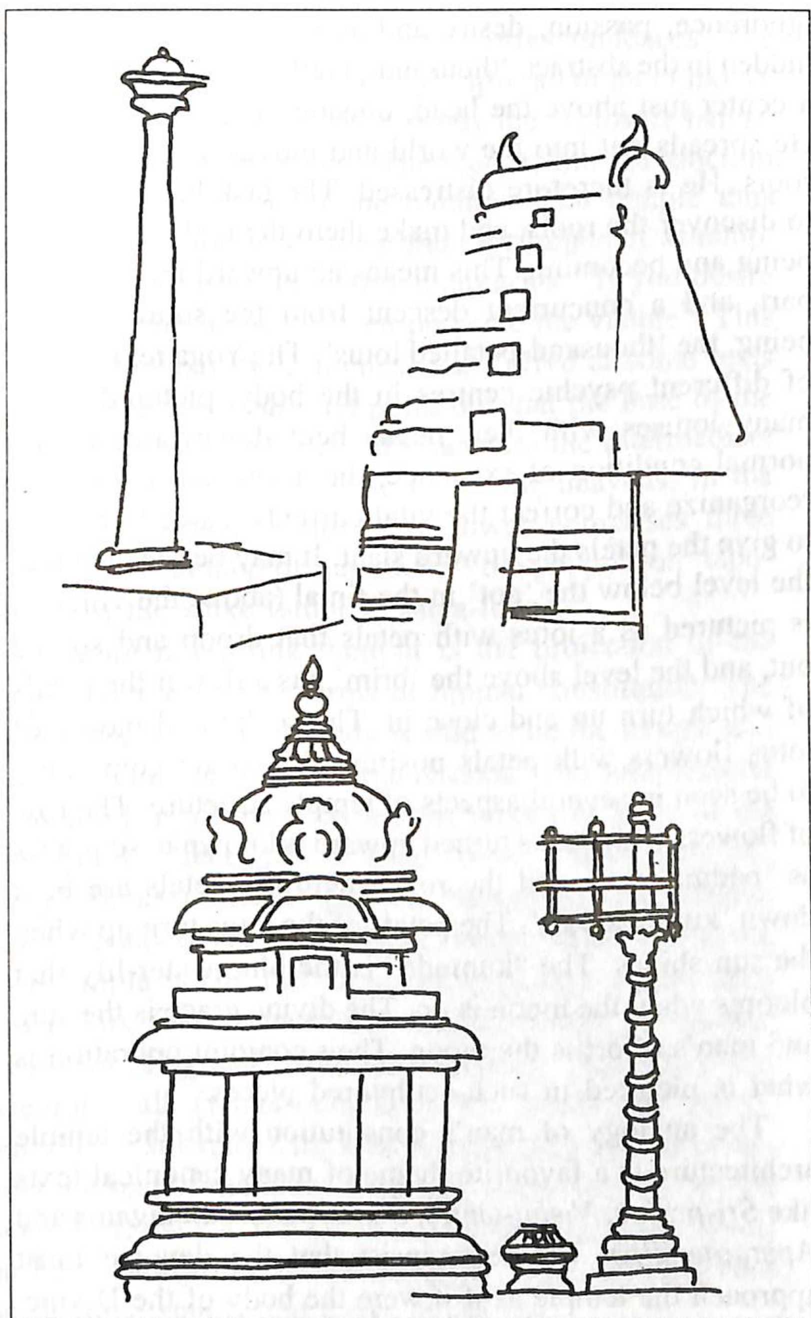
spirit. But it becomes meaningful only if there is a complementary process of descent ; the divine spirit must flow down into the material. The finial of the tower symbolizes the dual act of gathering the divine essence from the formless cosmos and communicating it to the main mass of the tower. The essence here acquires a concrete form and then descends into the sanctum, to be focussed in the icon. The sanctum is man's head, as will be evident in the analogue we will shortly consider. The stone slab over the roof (brahma-randhra-śilā) is the top of the head, representing the esoteric passage known as brahmarandhra. The hollow tube in the vase is the external projection of the main channel in the human constitution, the suṣumṇā-nāḍi. The axis on which the 'womb', "the icon', and the finial are positioned is also the path along which the ascent and descent of vital forces may be achieved.

The shrine thus demonstrates the constellation of the human and the divine currents ; matter moves up and the spirit flows down. The devotee that stands in front of the icon is expected to partake in this transaction. The emanations that proceed from the icon must be picked up by faith in his heart. Devotion is the transformer. The rituals conducted within the shrine involve these ideas, and attempt to facilitate transformation along the horizontal axis of icon-devotee. The devotee represents active matter and the icon passive spirit. The two are brought together in the creative act of worship.

When the Upaniṣads speak of the "inverted tree', they mean the phenomenal world of matter and spirit having its roots in the 'unmanifest' emanation of the Absolute. The reference is to man that is involved in the world of



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ignorance, passion, desire and activity. Man's roots are hidden in the abstract, 'thousand-petalled lotus' (sahasrāra), a center just above the head, outside the physical frame. He spreads out into the world and moves away from his roots. He is therefore distressed. The task before him is to discover the roots, and make them the real base for his being and becoming. This means an upward thrust on his part, and a concurrent descent from the source of his being, the 'thousand-petalled lotus'. The Yoga texts speak of different psychic centres in the body, pictured as so many lotuses with their petals bent downward, in the normal condition of existence; the adept will be able to reorganize and correct the vital currents inside him so as to give the petals the upward slant. It may be recalled that the level below the 'pot' in the finial (above the vimāna) is pictured as a lotus with petals that droop and spread out, and the level above the 'brim' has a flower the petals of which turn up and close in. The sculptured motifs of lotus flowers with petals positioned thus are commonly to be seen in several aspects of temple structure. The row of flowers with petals turned upward is known to sculptors as 'padma-vari', and the row where the petals are bent down 'kumuda-vari'. The petals of the lotus turn up when the sun shines. The "kumuda" is the blue water-lily that blooms when the moon is up. The divine grace is the sun, and man's effort is the moon. Their conjoint operation is what is pictured in such sculptured pieces.

The analogy of man's constitution with the temple architecture is a favourite theme of many canonical texts like *Śrī-praśna, Viṣṇu-tantra, Śilpa-ratna, Vātulāgama* and *Aparajita-śilpa.* The texts insist that the devotee must approach the temple as if it were the body of the Divine.

They further highlight significant correspondences. The sanctum is the head, the tower the top-knot of hair (śikhā), the pavilion middle parts of the body/the enclosure hands, and the entrance-tower feet. The icon within the sanctum is the personification of the mantras. The temple thus becomes a tool for the devotee and a technique of worship. We may recall what the Talmud suggests: "If you desire to perceive the invisible, then perceive the visible". This is precisely what the canonical texts drive at some texts (e.g. *Pārameśvara-saṁhitā*) point out that the base of the temple represents the earth, the sanctum the intermediate space, and the earth, and the tower the heavens. In the scheme of 'seven worlds', the tower comprises three worlds; the seat thereof 'jana-loka', the pot portion 'tapo-loka' and the spike (stūpī!) "satya-loka".

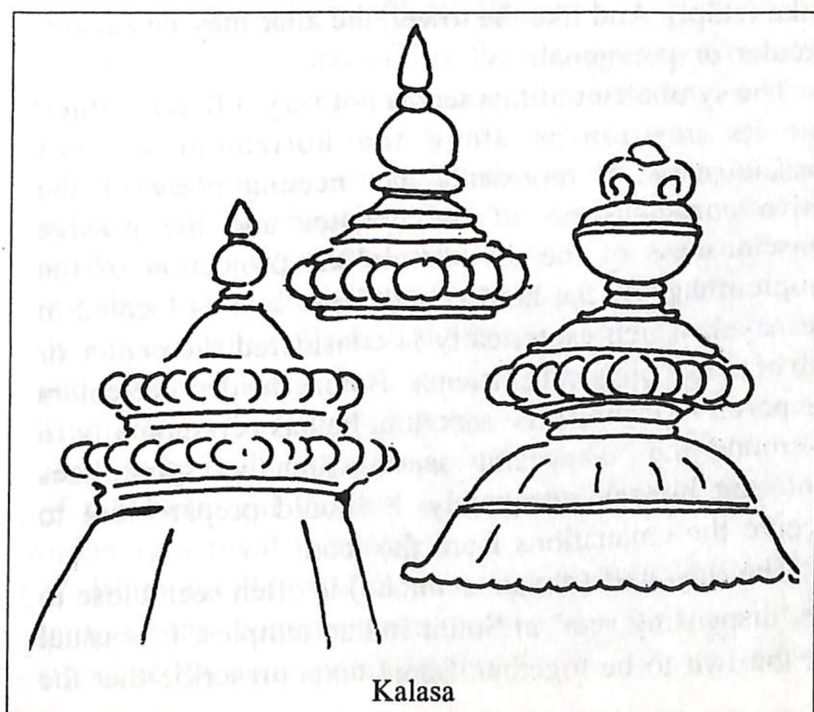
A more interesting thought is the projection of the temple architecture in terms of human constitution. The saying that 'the human body is said to be the temple and soul the icon" is found in many texts. The architectural terms used in all the texts are the names of parts of the human body : 'feet' (pāda), 'knee' (jānu), 'thighs' (jaṅghā), 'belly' (kukṣi), 'neck' (grīva), 'shoulders' (kandhara), "nose" (nāsīkā), 'face' (mukha), 'head' (śīrśa) and so on. As a temple is laid out; it is said to picture a man lying down. His feet connote the entrace-tower, his genital organ the flag-staff (dhvaja-stambha), -his belly the assembly-hall (raṅga-maṇḍapa), his heart 'the porch' (antarāla or śukanāsī), his head the sanctum, and the brow-meet the seat of the icon. There is another account Which reckons the neck as the sanctum and the head as the tower; the heart, according to this account, is the porch where the devotee stands and looks at the icon.

The forehead of man is said to represent the sanctum, and top of head, the tower. The space between the eyebrows is the seat of the icon. The icon is located in the ājñā center. The finial of the tower is unseen above the head, in the sahasrāra region; and the 'womb' of the sanctum at the tip of the nose.

Mention must be made here of the structural detail known as the altar or 'the dispensing seat' (bali-pīṭha), which is an indispensable associate of the sanctum. As already described, it is a small but stylized stone seat that is installed directly in front of the icon and very near the sanctum. Some texts prescribe that it must be outside the gopura or the first enclosure (*Viṣṇu-tilaka*, *Mānasāra*). It is on this seat that the food offerings to the attendant divinities and the guardian goblins are placed, after the main food offering to the icon in the sanctum has been completed. There will be several such seats around the sanctum in positions determined by the canonical texts. Usually altars are provided in the eight directions, but the one in front of the sanctum is regarded as the chief (pradhāna), and it will be the most ornate, and stylistically majestic, with several limbs such as the base, cornices, wall-surface with door-lets or niches. It is usually made of hard granite, but it is also built in bricks and mortar. There is a provision also for metal ones and when the altar is wooden it is recommended to be covered by metal sheets (*Kāraṇāgama*). Texts like *Śilpa-ratna* indicate that mud altars were also common at one time. Most texts suggest that the size of the altar should be 1/8, 1/7 or 1/5 of the dimension of the sanctum. Depending on their sizes and shapes, altars are classified into several types

such as Śrī-bandha, Padma-bandha, Śrī-bhadra, Sarvato-bhadra and so on.

Its development and incorporation into the Indian temple architecture are hard to delineate. Perhaps, it is a remnant of the Vedic yūpa and in many temples we do find bali-pīṭhas which are merely crude stone blocks or wooden posts. In the well-known temples, it is not unusual to find two 'dispensing seats' placed together, one crudely simple and the other stylistically sculpted. The former can be presumed to be the original, and the latter a later addition. It is also likely that the stone seat in early days was meant to offer animal food, and some canonical texts do contain details of offerings which include flesh mixed with turmeric powder. Whatever the origin, this seat is



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ritualistically very significant. In fact, the area of the real temple reached only to those seats; whatever structure is beyond them is deemed to be secondary, answering more to the donor's fancy than to the prescriptions of the texts. A text clearly lays down that a shrine consists only of four limbs : the sanctum, the icon, the tower above the sanctum, and the "dispensing seat'. And another text speaks of the 'dispensing seat' as a replica of the tower above the sanctum.

A text claims that the dispensing seat and the tower above the sanctum (vimāna) are indeed the same, for it is there that the gods assemble (*Nārāyaṇa-saṁhitā*). Indeed the shapes of the two closely resemble each other, with the difference that the altar is crowned by a flat lotus motif while the tower ends in a round kalaśa surmounted by a spike (stūpī). And like the tower, the altar may be square, circular or polygonal.

The symbolism of this seat is not very different either. But its position is along the horizontal axis of consciousness; it represents the meeting place of the active consciousness of the devotee and the passive consciousness of the divinity. In the projection of the temple-image on the human body, the 'seat' is located in the navel, which esoterically is considered the center or hub of man's physical existence. Before the devotee enters the porch in front of the sanctum, he has ceremonially to go round the 'dispensing seat', which act symbolizes centering himself adequately. It should prepare him to receive the emanations from the icon.

The flag-staff (dhvaja-staṁbha) is often seen close to the 'dispensing seat' in South Indian temples. It is usual for the two to be together. Some texts prescribe that the

'dispensing seat' must be located between the sanctum and the flag-staff, although in practice the flag-staff frequently takes the middle position. The custom of erecting this tall thin column, whose height varies from fifty to eighty feet, appears to be a late one. The early purpose was only to indicate the position of the sanctum. Even today, the mean shrines in villages and on highways when they are otherwise indistinguishable have flags on them, to show that they are places of worship. In North Indian temples, it is a practice to fly long and flowing banners from the tower itself. The canonical texts favour wooden or bamboo poles, with an uneven number of joints, upto twenty-five. Covering them with metal plates was optional. And the flag-staff was not necessarily intended as a permanent structure. Putting it up marked the commencement of occasional festivals in the temple.

However, in course of time the permanently fixed flag-staff became a common feature in temple architecture. The wooden pole, covered with copper, brass, or even silver plates gilded, is installed on a raised stone platform, often square in shape, in front of the sanctum. The top portion of this tall mast will have three horizontal perches (symbolising righteousness, reputation and propriety, or the three divinities Brahma the Creator, Viṣṇu the Preserver and Śiva the Destroyer), pointing towards the sanctum. The 'seat' of the flag-staff as well as the mast with perches came to be highly stylized in South India during the days of the Coḷa and Pāṇḍya rulers, for the flag- staff was uniquely a royal insignia.

When the flag-staff became a permanent detail in the temple, the commencement of festivals began to/be signalized by ceremonially hoisting a flag on it (masūraka).

Normally, however, the flag- staff will only be a column without the banner (niṣpatāka). It would only indicate the limit of the consecrated area of the shrine. When occasion demands, a banner would be flown -from its top (sapatāka). *Hayaśīrṣa-saṁhitā*, a Pāñcarātra text, which insists "that a building (prāsāda) without a flag would be in vain, gives some interesting details about the position and height of the mast, the type of bamboo that is to be chosen, the colour of the cloth for the banner, and so on. The benefit of the flag-mast is here said to be "obtainment of all that is desired". Another text, *Śiva-sarvsva*, describes the purpose of the flag as indication of the insignia of the deity, or of the characteristic vehicle of the icon that is within the sanctum.

The symbolism of the flag-staff is not clear in the textual accounts, probably because it was a late innovation and not a necessary involvement of the shrine. It was an introduction from royal association, and therefore the usual symbolism is that of victory and prosperity. A tall flag-post, richly decorated and elaborately installed, would mean a rich and prosperous temple commanding royal patronage; it is a sign of pomp and pride. God is the greatest of kings and the temple is His palace.

A text mentions that when the flag is hoisted in front of the temple, gods as well as manes will be delighted. Otherwise, according to the text, demons and goblins would sneak in and make the temple their abode (*Prāsāda-maṇḍana*). The association of flag-posts with tall lamp-posts in the temples is well-known. One may recall that there is a custom of erecting tall Yama- dīpas on occasions to provide satisfaction for the departed ancestors and to illumine their path towards our realm. The flag-post is also

magical in its significance. The texts assign Śiva to the bottom of the post, Brahma to the middle portion and Viṣṇu to the top.

While in the South, the flag-cloth (patāka) is occasionally tied to the flag-post, it is ever present in the temples of the North. The length of the cloth in the latter case will be equal to the length of the flag-post, which will be fixed to the top member of the tower over the sanctum. South Indian vimānas, however, are not meant to accommodate the flag-post, which is a distinct member, outside the inner enclosure.

But the 'flag' in the traditional context also means a resolve to exert and a will to succeed. Hoisting the flag suggests setting out to conquer. The devotee coming into the temple would have to resolve to conquer his own baser nature, to set out on a war with his own mean disposition; a look at the flag-mast would be a reminder for him in this regard. The Sanskrit word for the flag or banner, dhvaja, strictly means whatever is raised. It therefore has the connotations of hope, desire (especially erotic desire which is physically expressed as erection, and the Sanskrit expression is frequently employed in this context), pride, arrogance and will. Whatever raises man to a higher level of understanding and activity is dhvaja. It is a call that god is high and above (*Mahābhārata*, 1, 33, 17). The characteristic animal and the insignia of the icon on the banner gives a direction to the devotee's desire and will. When the devotee sights the banner and bows to it, he resolves to rise higher.

The Indian temple is thus a constellation of symbolism. It is an image that is at once relevant to human aspirations and persistent in human thought and actions. The texts of

Indian architecture which provide us with all the details of measurements and parts of the temple, and prescribe the rites of installation and rituals of worship, also indicate the real value of a shrine :

'The ritualists have their God in the fire ; but the wise folk find Him in their own heart. It is the dullwitted one that seeks God in an icon. Thus who have higher understanding see God in everything."

अग्नौ क्रियावतां देवो
हृदि देवो मनीषिणाम्।
प्रतिमा स्वल्पबुद्धीनाम्
ज्ञानिनां सर्वतो हरिः॥

(अग्निपुरांणे)

Chapter II

WORSHIP IN TEMPLE

Three are said to be the factors that contribute to the presence of divinity in a shrine:

अर्चकस्य तपोयोगात् अर्चनस्यातिशायनात्।
आभिरूप्याच्च बिम्बानां देवः सान्निध्यमृच्छति॥

The first refers to the personality and character of the priest who is entrusted with the responsibility of worship. The priest mediates between Godhead and the devotees who visit the shrines. His austerity and superior conduct make him an effective medium through which divine grace may flow. The second factor is the manner in which worship is conducted. If worship is in perfect accord with the Āgamic prescriptions, with all the details meticulously attended to, it facilitates the presence of Godhead in the deity worshipped. And the third factor pertains to the beauty of the icon in which divinity is invoked by the priest through worship. The icon's beauty is an important consideration for attracting the devotee's attention and for facilitating his absorption. *Mānasāra* (51,70) tells us that the beauty of the icon is determined by the fidelity with which the Śilpa-śāstra canons of proportions are followed by the sculptor.

शास्त्रमानेन यो रम्यः स रम्यो नाऽन्य एव हि।

The āgama texts deal with all three factors that facilitate the expression of divinity in a shrine, especially with the second factor, viz. the correct, and therefore the effective, worship that must be accorded to the deity. The expression, 'vigraha' for the deity signifies that the icon is being especially treated (viśeṣeṇa gṛhyate it). The icon is not mistaken for Godhead: the texts make it clear that it is only a device which enables one to approach Godhead properly ('ālaṁbanasya prādhānyena dhyānam pratīkopāstih'), and hence it is also called 'pratimā', a symbol. The worship rituals explicate the symbolism for the discerning devotee. Worship itself is symbolic.

Godhead is formless and subtle, beyond our apprehension. But out of its own will, it will manifest with a form before the devotee, when properly worshipped. The simile of clarified butter in milk, oil in the sesamum seeds, scent in flowers or fire in wood is given: by churning, butter is got; by pressing, oil comes out; by squeezing, scent is got; and by friction, fire comes out. We read in *Marīci-saṁhitā*:

काष्ठे अग्निर्मथनादुज्ज्वलन्निव निष्कलात्मको
विष्णुर्ध्यानमथनेन भक्त्या स्वसंकल्पनात् सकलो भवति॥

Daily worship (nityārcanā) in Āgama is tantamount to the rituals known as nitya-karmas in Mīmāṁsaka circles, rituals which are obligatory and invariant. It is eulogized in *Ajitāgama* (*kriyā*, 20,1) as superior to the nitya-rituals in the shape of yajñas enjoined on the householders ('sarva-yajñottamottamam'); as capable of warding off all sins, even as the yajñas are believed to do ('sarva-papa-haram'); and accomplish all purposes ('sarva-siddhipradam nṛṇam'). *Kāraṇāgama* (1,30,1-2) points out that daily

worship in a temple would be competent to procure all the rewards that are said to follow the performance of yajñas ("sarva-yajña-phala-pradam').

Suprabhedāgama (1,8,1-2) adds that daily worship would also contribute to the happiness of all people, to their prosperity and to the overcoming of all obstructions; it will make for the glory of the king and of the country:

अथातः संप्रवक्ष्यामि शिवार्चनाविधिक्रमम्।
सर्वपापहरं दिव्यं सर्वलोकसुखावहम्।
श्रीप्रदं सर्वविघ्नघ्नं राज्ञो राष्ट्रविवर्धनम्॥

Worship takes two forms: worship in the household for ones own sake (ātmārtha, svārtha), and worship in the temple for the sake of others, viz. the public (parārtha)

आत्मार्थं च परार्थं च यजनं द्विविधं स्मृतम्।
(*Ajitāgama, Kriyā,* 20,2)

आत्मार्थं च परार्थं च पूजा द्विविधमुच्यते
(*Kāraṇāgama,* 1,30,2)

The distinction between the two forms made in the āgama texts relates to the persons who are eligible to perform them. In the former case, the householder worships the moveable icon (or linga) given to him by his guru (who accords him the necessary initiation) in his own house, keeping it on a platform; or he worships the image belonging to the temporary variety (kṣaṇika, made for the purpose each day by butter, flour-dough, jaggery, clay or cowdying), or worships the deity in the yantra or in the Kalasa filled with water; or he contemplates upon the deity in his own heart; or he may worship the deity in painting or on screen.

दत्ते च गुरूणा लिङ्गे स्थण्डिले स्वयमात्मनि।
क्षणिके मण्डले तोयेऽप्यात्मार्थयजनं स्मृतम्।।

(*Kāraṇāgama*, 1,30,3)

दीक्षितो गुरुणा तेन दत्तं लिङ्ग चलात्मकम्।
गृहीत्वा तत्र वान्यत्र क्षणिके स्थाण्डिलेऽथ वा।।
जले वा प्रतिमायां वा मण्डले चित्रकेऽपि वा।
पटे वा हृदये वाऽथ भवेदात्मार्थमर्चनम्।।

(*Ajitāgama*, Kriyā, 20,3-4)

Worship of the other type (viz. parārtha) is required to be performed always by the professional priest in a public place (such as a temple). The Śaivāgamas refer to such priests whose profession is to worship as Śiva-brāhmaṇas or ādi-śaivas; they descend from ancestors who were created by God himself for this purpose. Vaikhānasāgamas make a similar claim for the Vaikhānasa-priests in Viṣṇu temples. The Pāñcarātrins too are professional priests who claim special eligibility to worship in a temple. We read for instance in *Kāmikāgama* (1,4,6-7), that worship by those other than these chosen priests would spell ruin to the land and the people:

परार्थयजनं कार्यं शिवविप्रैस्तु नित्यशः।
धार्मिकः कथ्यते नित्यमादिशैवो द्विजोत्तमः।।
अन्ये तु स्वार्थकादन्यत्कुर्युश्चेत्कर्तृनाशनम्।
शिवसृष्टिं विना ये तु जायन्ते ब्रह्मणो मुखात्।।
ते सामान्या न तेषां तु परार्थेज्याधिकारिता।
यदि मोहेन कुर्वीरन् राज्ञो राष्ट्रस्य नाशनम्।।

The professional priests are entitled to undertake both forms of worship (svārtha or ātmārtha and parārtha), while

others can only worship in the household:

शिवविप्रेण कर्तव्यमात्मार्थं च परार्थकम्।
विप्रक्षत्रियवैश्याश्च शूद्राश्चैव च दीक्षिताः।
आत्मार्थमर्चनं कुर्यान्न कुर्यात्तु परार्थकम्॥

(*Aṁśumadāgama,* 3-4)

Worship for the public is conducted in temples erected by sages, kings, chieftains or the people, especially in temples for which provision has been made to defray the expenses of worship as well as the expenditure. on maintenance: The professional priests enjoy the financial and other benefits in return for the services rendered:

प्रासादादिषु सर्वत्र स्थापितेषु बहुष्वपि।
राज्ञा वा राजकल्पैर्वा जनैर्जानपदैस्तु वा॥
अनुभूय कृतां वृत्तिं क्रियते यद्यदर्चनम्।
तत्परार्थमिति प्रोक्तमन्येषां फलदानतः॥

(*Ajitāgama*, Kriyā, 20,6-7)

Marīhi's *Ānanda-saṁhitā* (1,35) mentions that worship is three-fold: bodily, verbal and mental. Bodily worship is again two-fold: without an icon and with an icon.

तस्य विश्वात्मनो विष्णोरर्चनं त्रिविधं यथा।
मानसं वाचिकं वाथ कायिकं वापि तत् त्रयम्।
कायिकं द्विविधं प्रोक्तममूर्तं समूर्तकम्॥

(1,34-35)

Mental worship is contemplating in seclusion upon Godhead either in ones own heart or in the solar orb, or upon the form of Viṣṇu (arcā). Verbal worship is articulation of Vedic hymns which eulogize Godhead. Bodily worship is performance of sacrifices or offering several services

to an icon. In the Kṛta-age, mental worship was regarded as best, while in the Tretā-age performance of sacrifices. In the Dvāpara-age, iconic worship was meritorious, but in the Kali-age (viz. the present age) thinking of Godhead is the best

कृते तु मानसं श्रेष्ठं त्रेतायां यजनं परम्।
द्वापरे प्रतिमार्चा च कलौ चिन्तनमुत्तमम्॥

(1,48)

The commentary on the text explains that all that is mentioned till now pertains to the household worship or svārtha (or ātmārtha) mode of worship ('svārtham gṛhārcanam proktam'). The text continues that what is indicated in all the ages is worship with five factors (recitation of mantras, ritualistic acts, materials for the various services, meditation and emotional involvement or devotion) and thirty-two services closing with the obligatory fire-oblations and expiations. This is known as worship in a shrine (or parārtha) and is meant to contribute prosperity for all people.

चतुर्ष्वपि युगेष्वेवं विशेषस्तु युगे युगे।
मन्त्रोच्चार क्रियाद्रव्यध्यानभावाङ्ग पञ्चकम्॥
द्वात्रिंशदुपचारेण परिवार गणान्वितम्।
नित्यहोमोत्सवान्तं च प्रायश्चित्तक्रियाक्रमम्।
तत्परार्थार्चनं प्रोक्तं सर्वलोकाभिवृद्धिदम्॥

(1,49-50)

Kāśyapīya-jñāna-kāṇḍa TTD, Tirupati, 1960) specifies that worship in a temple is called 'vimānārcanā, and that it is meritorious, public, long-standing and conducive of results of all sacrifices.

सा विमानार्चना पुण्या सर्वक्रतुफलप्रदा सार्वजनीना चिरस्थापिनी

(page 37)

Although Āgama concerns itself principally with the worship done in the temple, it lays emphasis on household worship, for even the professional priest must finish his customary worship at home before he arrives at the temple. Worship in the temple cannot be a substitute for household worship either for the priest or for the lay devotee. One may choose to go or not to go to the temple, and there are conditions which preclude the priest from entering the sanctum and worship the deity. But household worship is obligatory; it must not under any circumstance be given up.

Kāśyapīya-jñāna-kāṇḍa, (Tirumala Tirupati Devasthānams, Tirupati, 1960) which extols worship in a temple as tantamount to Vedic sacrifices ('tasmād alaye vidhinā viṣṇor nityārcanam anāhitagnīnam agnihotra-samam yasmād etach cāgnihotra-phalam dadāti', 2, p.2), nevertheless insists that every home must have a place for worship, and worshipping the gods there thrice, two times or at least once a day will make for all prosperity.

..त्रिकाल द्विकालमेककालं वाऽऽर्चयेत्। एते च पूजिता यस्य सद्मन्यत्रैव सर्वकल्याणसम्पत्।

(page 36).

If one does not carry out this household worship, it would for him be suicidal; and his house, where no worship is conducted, is like a crematorium, and respectable folk must not enter such a house.

अन्यथा आत्मघाती भवति। विष्णुपूजाविहीनं
यद्वेश्म तत्पितृवनैः समम्। तद्विप्रमुख्यैर्न प्रवेश्यम्॥

(page 37)

The temple is distinguished from a household shrine not only in its structure and organization but also in its rituals and forms of worship. The 'Āgamas' lay down procedural details for worship in a temple, while worship in the household shrine is largely ruled by family traditions and customs.

Worship in the household shrine is by necessity a simple ritual of comparatively short duration, conducted mostly but once a day (in the morning at no fixed time). Generally, the head of the family or some older member of the household would attend to it; and he does it not only for himself but on behalf of all the members of the household. Actual participation in the worship, however, is not obligatory for the other members. -Even when the ritual tends to be elaborate, there would be little of ostentation and less of formality. This worship is done according to ones convenience and ability. *Suprabheda* (kriyā, 8,10) says

आत्मार्थं पूजयेद्विद्वान् यथाशक्त्यनुरोधतः॥

Worship in a temple is characteristically elaborate, and is conducted three, five or six times during twenty-four hours. In many of the more famous temples, worship rituals are almost continuous during the day and stretch far into the night. And the ritual sequences are meant to attract and impress crowds of devotees. The priests who officiate in temples carry out the worship not for their own sake but for the sake of the public, the state and

for the welfare of all humanity (so at least the scriptures say).

This worship when it concludes with havis (fire-oblations) is called 'śuddha'; when it goes as far as nityotsava, it is 'miśra' and when it extends to śuddha-nṛtta (dance) it is 'saṅkīrṇa'. *Ajitāgarna* (20,19-2) lays down:

प्रातर्मध्याह्नसायेषु या पूजा क्रियते जनैः।
तां मिश्रां तु प्रकुर्वीत संकीर्णा विशेषतः॥

Worship in the household shrine is largely guided by family traditions and customs rather than by set rules, although there tends to be some uniformity in the rituals owing to belongingness to religious groups. But the worship-manuals known as 'āgamas' describe procedural details for worship in a temple both elaborately and with precision. They have done it so consistently and for so long that worship in the temples has acquired considerable uniformity despite sectarian affiliations (like Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, and Śākta)..

While it is true that temples in the South differ from the temples in the North both with regard to their structures and to their ritual details, closer inquiry would reveal that these differences are more apparent than real, more superficial than deep. It may appear at first glance that the hold of the 'āgamas' is stronger in South Indian temples than in their North Indian counterparts, but among the more celebrated temples in the North (like Vārāṇasi, Dvārakā, Puri-Jagannāth, Kāmākhya, Badari, etc.), 'āgamas' do play a very significant role in the worship procedures. But the 'āgamas' of the North Indian temples have not been either as numerous or as widely

familiar as the 'āgamas' in the South. When, however, the two classes of the 'āgamas' are compared, they will be found to contain prescriptions which are very similar and symbolism derived from a common source.

The most significant aspect of the worship in a temple is its collective character. Worship in a household shrine is termed as mentioned earlier, 'ātmārtha' or 'svārtha' (viz. for the sake of one who worships, or for his immediate family), while worship in a temple is carried out by the priest for the sake of others, and hence called 'parārtha' (viz. for the sake of other devotees who gather there). The temple is a public place, and belongs to the community.

सर्वेषामात्मरक्षार्थं इष्टलिङगार्चनं गृहे।
आत्मार्थमिति विज्ञातम्॥

(*Kāraṇāgama*, 1,30, 12)

सर्वेषां रक्षणार्थाय ग्रामादिषु विशेषतः।
तत्परार्थं समाख्यातम्........॥

(op.cit, 1, 30, 10)

The priest who worships there expects to be compensated in some way (such as wages, donations by the devotees, provisions by the management, share in the proceeds etc). The privilege to conduct the actual worship in a temple was earlier acquired solely by heredity, or by inclination or even by proficiency in the 'āgamas'; it has now to be conferred by the management of the temple, the trustees or administrators who are believed to act on behalf of the entire community, by a contractual arrangement. The priest in the temple therefore worships only in return to the benefits that are available to him. The worship that he conducts is in fact symbolic of the worship conducted by the community.

Because the community is actually or symbolically involved in the worship conducted in the temple, the rituals acquire a public character. Worship is mostly carried out in full view of the devotees that have gathered there. In the temple architecture, a provision is always made for a viewers' hall In front of the sanctum called nava-raṅga, raṅga-maṇḍapa, or mukha-maṇṭapa. This is usually a highly elegant and elaborately ornate structure. The devotees prefer to be viewers rather than priests owing to several practical considerations such as lack of the knowledge of the worship rituals, lack of inclination, lack of time, difficulties of accommodation and so on. But in the temple, they are the true worshippers, and the priest only officiates on their behalf.

The public character of worship in the temple is emphasized by the numerous processions and festivals involving the participation directly of the whole community. The 'Āgamas' prescribe a large number of festivals which are to be conducted in the temple for the benefit of the people residing in that locality for the welfare of the state in which the temple is situated, and for the good of the entire mankind. At the end of each festival a formal blessing is invariably invokved on the community, the administration and humanity. The most important among these festivals is the 'rathotsava' or the 'car festival', when the deity, normally worshipped within the temple, is taken out and made to go round the twon, so that all the people (even those who are otherwise disabled) have an opportunity of viewing and worshipping.

Such festivals are, for obvious reasons, excluded from household worship. The images worshipped are never take out of the shrine-room, nor displayed to visitors. And

the occasions for festivals in a household are much fewer than in a temple. Free and sumptuous feeding of all the participating devotees is a necessary feature of a temple festival, and to facilitate this the more important temples will have adequate financial resources. Such practices are obviously impossible in a household. Thus, the family members are the only participants in household worship, even when a festival is being celebrated.

The temple, even the modest one, is basically an organization it is structurally designed to accommodate large or small gatherings of devotees on occasions, and also to house the images, vessels, vehicles, clothes, adornments and other material required for festivals and processions. Functionally it involves the services of several people. Besides the priest of priests, a temple of some means would have assistants for the priest, staff to clean the premises, personnel for looking after several details of a festival, guards and watchmen. Occasional, voluntary and free service of devotees is also availed of. Thus a temple is a social and economic organization, apart from being a religious institution.

The worship in a temple is, therefore, multi-dimensional. It is not so much spiritual as religious, and religious phenomena are a complex of social, economic, recreational and educational proceses. A temple in its intent comprehends all these aspects. Activities in the temple, especially during festivals, represent a mosaic of the individual's life within the community. The history of the celebrated temples (like the one at Tirumalai, or the one in Cidambaram, or the one in Puri-Jagannāth) illustrates how important the temple is in the evolution of the ethos of populations through dynastic successions.

The interest shown by kings, chieftains, officers and the wealthy folk in the culture of temples has always been remarkable, and records suggest that the interest was not always religious, much less spiritual.

Another particular also merits mention in this context. The priests officiating in the temple tend to form a class of their own, quite distinct from others belonging to the priestly profession such as the purohitas (or those who officiate in special religious events like the marriage, investiture, funerary rites, obsequies, sacramental rituals and so on), vaidikas (or those who visit households and assist in the worship rituals daily or occasionally), and paṇḍits (or learned brahmins who teach scriptural texts, or give public discourses on religious subjects). The temple-priests usually belong to the priestly families who have served in the temple for generations. They have their own especial initiations (dīkṣā), and their training involves an acquaintance with the 'āgamas' of particular sectarian persuations. It is these that qualify them to conduct worship in temples, for the other priestly brahmins do not undergo the special initiation, nor acquire a knowledge of the 'Āgamas.

In fact, the more learned and conservative among brahmins consider worship in a temple not suitable for a truly religious person who is evolved. For one thing, idolatry itself is the lowest form of worship, prescribed in the texts only for a person of ordinary equipment and inclination. For another, carrying on worship in public smacks of pomp and show; the display of religious fervour in public is denounced in the scriptures as vulgar. For still another, worship which involves remuneration or recompense is in reality a business transaction, and fails

to bring about spiritual benefits. For yet another, all acts of worship can only be personal; scriptures do not commend collective worship.

Thus there is a prejudice among the orthodox against temple-priests, in fact against all professional priests. Manu denounces even a learned brahmin who teaches sacred texts and gets payed for it as a 'hireling' (bhṛtakādhyāpaka). This prejudice has resulted in relatively well-defined, closed, endogamous, and distinct classes of temple-priests of Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava and Śakta persuations. They have been for generations custodians of the scriptural lore concerning worship in temples. And they have been responsible for the temple-culture that has prevailed in the country since the early centuries of the Christian era.

The arguments of the orthodox against temples and worship of images in them are not unknown to the authors or compilers of the worship-manuals, viz. Āgamas. They concede that the best form of worship is contemplation on the invisible God as the inner-controller (antaryāmin) abiding in ones own heart ('munīnam hṛdi daivatam'); and they are aware that it is only people with little intelligence that see God in an icon ("pratimā" svalpa-buddhīnām'). This opinion is quoted in the Smṛti ascribed to the great Aparārka.

While this is so, the Āgama texts point out that it is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, for one to contemplate on the divinity without conceptualizing a form ('na ca rūpam vinā devo dhyātum kenāpi śakyate', *Viṣṇu-samhitā*, 29,51). It is in the very nature of mind to conjure up images. If the mind is forbidden to do this, it may lapse into drowsiness or wander about without direction. Mind has necessarily to be employed in worship,

and therefore one finds an image of God a great advantage. Another text (*Parama-saṁhitā*, 3,5-10) suggests that a human form for God is very helpful for the devotee to meditate on the divine attributes to offer prayers, to approach with love and devotion.

Kāśyapa's *Jñāna-kāṇḍa*, which distinguishes worship of an icon (sa-mūrta) from worship with fire (amūrta) recommends the former as superior. It pleases the eye and delights the heart; it promotes devotion and faith, which are indispensable for all accomplishments. This mode of worship in temple becomes complete and effective with all the services

द्विविधं तदर्चनमाख्यातं अमूर्तं समूर्तं चेति।
तदित्त्थमग्नौ हुतममूर्तं समूर्तं तद्बिम्बेऽर्चनम्।
समूर्ते चक्षुर्मनसोः प्रीतिः सदा संस्मृतिश्च। ताभ्यां
भक्तिश्रद्धे स्याताम्। श्रद्धाभक्तियुतस्यैव सर्वसंसिद्धि।
आलये समूर्तार्चनं बल्युत्सवाद्युपचारयोगात् सम्पूर्णम्॥

There is an interesting argument in *Arcanā-tilaka* (of Bhārad-vāja-nṛsiṁha); Bhṛgu tells us that worship is of two kinds (I) 'with external props' (sālaṁba) and (ii) without them (nirālaṁba); and that in ancient times the sages and wise folk decided that the former was superior to the latter, as far as the common people involved in the transactional world are concerned. Only the vānaprasthas, the renunciants, the ascetics and the extremely indigent will benefit from worship of God without a form; for all others, especially householders, such worship is difficult.

संसारे चलचित्त विभ्रमधियां साकारमेवोत्तमम्।
वानप्रस्थयतेर्निराशन पतत्पर्णाशिनां निष्कलम्।

दारिद्र्योपहतात्मनां च विहिता पूजा निरालम्बना
अन्येषां गृहवासिनां च सततं कष्टं निरालम्बनम्॥

(1,20)

Further, for those who seek for worldly rewards like children, wives, wealth and heavenly pleasures before salvations, worship of God with form is indicated. Born in this present decadent age, filled with ego and selfishness, looking for worldly comforts and security, and troubled by desire, anger, greed, jealousy, confusion and arrogance, how can we contemplate upon Godhead devoid of form ? Worship of icons is therefore most meritorious and easily accomplished:

योषित्पुत्रधनार्थिनां च भवनस्वर्गादि भोगैषिणम्
पश्चान्मोक्षमुपेयुषां च सुलभं साकारमेवार्चमम्।
ममेताहंकारयुक्तात्मनां क्षीणानां कलिजन्मनां
मूलस्योपहतात्मनां व्यसनिनां स्त्रीपुत्रवित्तैषिंणां॥

षड्वर्गापहतात्मनां च सुदृढध्यानं कथं वा भवे-
त्तस्मान्मूर्तिषु पूजनं शुभकरं कष्टं निरालम्बनम्।
चेतोनेत्र मनः प्रसादजननं सन्दर्शनाद्भक्तिदं
तस्मादत्र कलौ मार्गं च सुलभं सौन्दर्यमूर्त्यर्चनम्॥

(21,22).

It is therefore that the temples contain images of God in human form, excepting the Śiva shrines where the image in the sanctum is a lingam (but the processional images even there will be in human form). It was usual in the medieval times for pious kings and chieftains to build temples, and the underlying idea was that God was the overlord even of the kings. If the king rules over a

region or territory, God rules over the entire world, nay over all the worlds that be. The God in the temple reminded the devotee of the king in his palace. The old Sanskrit expression for the temple, 'prāsāda', means also a palace.

Thus all honour that was due to an earthly king was considered due on a more magnificent scale to the God, who is the

king of kings and before whom even the kings bow their heads. All earthly kings derive their glory from Kubera-Vaiśravaṇa who is addressed as the 'overlord of the lords (mahārājādhirāja) and who bestows wealth and power on mortals; and this Kubera attends on God. Thus, worship in a temple tends to incorporate customs and formalities of a typical royal court.

Chapter III

RITUAL REQUIREMENTS

Worship in a temple is a complex of ceremonies which are essentially religious in significance and of events which are essentially social in import. The former pertain to the rituals meant to preserve the spiritual power of the image in the sanctum and to promote the sanctity of the shrine. The latter, however, are the means of attracting the devotees and of improving the image of the temple in the eyes of the people. The former may be described as 'rituals' (karmārcā), while the latter are the 'festivals' (utsava).

There will be procedures to be carried out, inside the sanctum or outside it, every day by the priests at the appointed hours in complete or partial seclusion. They are not meant for public view, nor do they involve participation by the lay devotees. These activities, being in the nature of rites, must necessarily be carried out, and in precisely the manner prescribed in the manuals. The 'āgama' texts contain the prescriptions in minute detail, and a thorough acquaintance with these prescriptions is one of the major qualifications for a priest. And these are activities which only a priest can perform, by virtue of the initiation that he would have received.

These activities include the preparations for the day's worship, like cleaning the enclosure, cleaning of the

vessels for use in worship, removal of the old flowers from the image in the sanctum, collection of fresh water for the day's rituals, preparation of the sandal paste, collection of some specified herbs to be put into ritual water like arghya and pādya, gathering of flowers for decorating the image and trimming the oil-lamps in and around the sanctum. These are not necessarily carried out by the priest himself, unless he has no assistants, or the temple has no provision for attenders (paricāraka). They are not rites proper, and so do not require initiation. But in temples where the rule of custom is old and strong, no one other than the qualified priest is allowed to enter the sanctum or touch the image, and therefore much of these preparatory services falls to his lot.

Water for use inside the sanctum has to be ritualistically pure, and can be collected only by the priest when he is ready for the day's service. Flowers, fruits and other materials required for daily worship may be brought by others, but they need 'to be sanctified before being taken inside the sanctum. It is only the priest that can so sanctify them. He does it by sprinkling water on them, and this water must have been previously sanctified by him, having beeen collected by himself.

Scriptural texts insist that water for use in worship must be collected from a running stream, a spring, a natural lake or a pond, or a well exposed to sunlight and fresh air. It was customary in the olden days to select the site for building a temple in close proximity to a natural and perennial source of water. It is usual to find in old temples a natural lake or artificial pond, called 'pushkariṇī', which will not only provide water for various services in the temple but will facilitate the festival called 'jala-kelī'

(or 'nir-āṭṭam' in Tamiḷ) or 'teppotsava'.

The use of water in a temple is manifold and much. And water for rituals needs to be freshly collected every morning. Generally, the use of water with reference to the image in the sanctum is four-fold: (1) water offered to the image for washing the feet (pādya); (2) water offered for sipping or rinsing the mouth (ācamana); (3) water offered as oblation (arghya); and (4) water for bathing the image (snāna). Scriptural texts insist that water used for different functions must be differently got up. The water for washing the feet is mixed with four substances, viz. khus khus (uṣīra), sandal-wood paste (candana), blades of dūrvā-grass and white-mustard (siddha). Water for sipping is mixed with six articles, viz., cardamom (elā), cloves (lavaṅga), camphor (kar-pūra), the fruit called jaṁbu, jasmine (jāti) and the fruit called priyangu. Water for oblation must have eight substances put in it: gingelly (tila), rice (vrīhi), tips of the kuśa-grass, milk, wheat, winnowed grains (taṇḍula), mustard (sarśapa), and water from the conch.

Water for ceremonial bath is elaborately prepared with numerous herbs, spices, flowers, grains and unguents. The bath is also given by a herbal decoction (kaṣāya) made by the barks of seven trees: palāśa, uduṁbara, aśvattha, madhūka, plakṣa, pāṭala and jaṁbū. Water from the tender coconut (nālikera) is also employed. A preparation known as 'pañcāmṛta', consisting of an amalgum of fruits like plantains and mangoes mixed with five substances (milk, curds, clarified butter, honey and sugar), is used for administering a bath on festive occasions.

Purificatory bath is conducted with the mixture of five products of cow (pañcagavya): clarified butter (ghṛta,

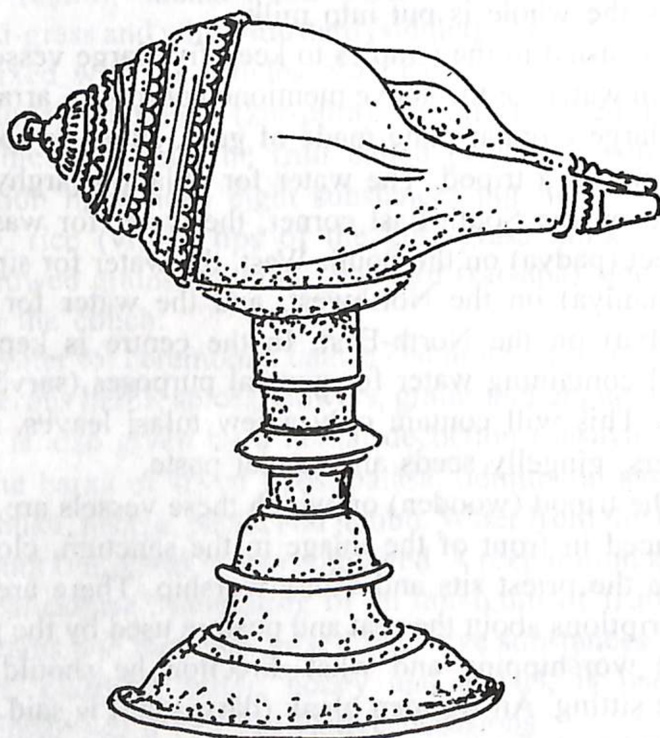
representing Rudra, and regarded as most adorable), curds (dadhi, representing Soma and productive of progeny), milk (kṣīra, representing Śukra, and helpful in eliminating enemies), cow's urine (go-mūtra, representing Naṭa and productive of prosperity) and cow's refuse (go-maya, representing Arka or Sun, and beneficial in warding off diseases). This bath is given on astrologically significant days (like ayana, viṣuva), or during solar or lunar eclipse, or during any auspicious occasion. There is a standard method of preparing this concoction : the cow's refuse is first mixed with cow's urine, and then this is put in clarified butter, which in turn is mixed with curds, and finally the whole is put into milk.

It is usual in the temples to keep five large vessels to contain water for the above mentioned purposes, arranged on a large circular plate made of gold, silver or copper, standing on a tripod. The water for oblation (arghya) is placed on the South-East corner, the water for washing the feet (pādya) on the South-West, the water for sipping (ācamanīya) on the Northwest, and the water for bath (snānīya) on the North-East. In the centre is kept the vessel containing water for general purposes (sarvārtha-toya). This will contain only a few tulasi leaves, some flowers, gingelly seeds and sandal paste.

The tripod (wooden) on which these vessels are kept, is placed in front of the image in the sanctum, close to where the priest sits and offers worship. There are also prescriptions about the seat and posture used by the priest while worshipping and what direction he should face while sitting. An wooden plank (dārvāsana) is said to be the best seat, for it is conducive to prosperity. Sitting on a piece of cloth spread on the floor is health-giving;

woollen blanket used as a seat removes sorrow; and sitting on the deer-skin facilitates the obtainment of wisdom (*Aṁśumad-āgama*). According to *Kārṇāgama* the best posture for a worshipper is to squat so that the knees and the tips of the feet are close together, and to focus the vision slightly on the tip of the nose. This is known as rucirāsana, described as "beneficial in all worship' ('sarva-pūjā-hita').

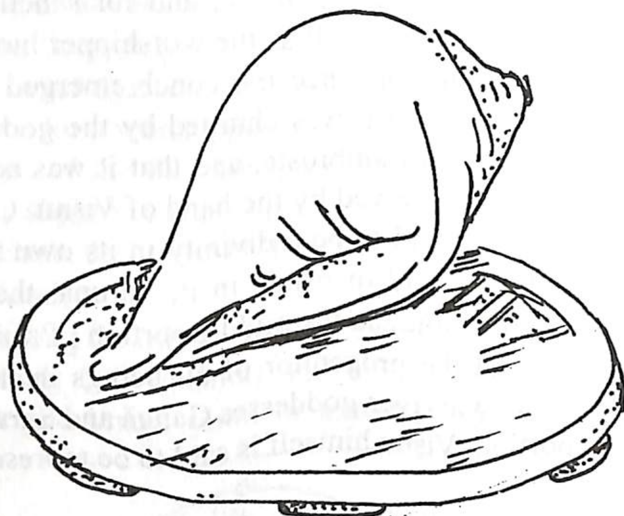
Among the other articles necessary for worship, conch (śaṁkha), bell (ghaṇṭā) and utensils for waving lights before the image (ārati or āraṭrikā) are important. The

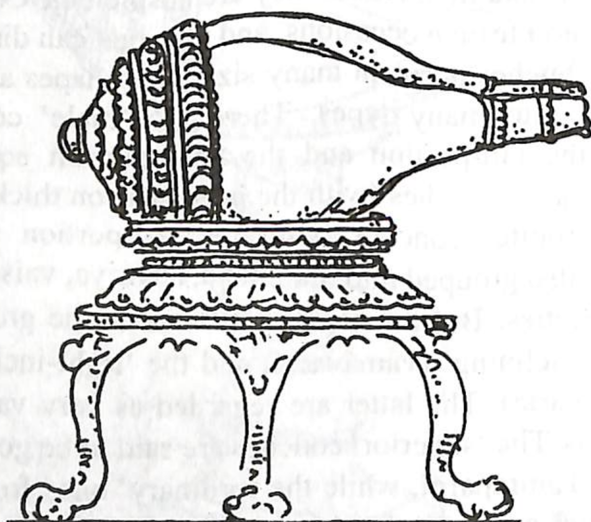


Śaṁkha

conch is used in bathing the image, and for sanctifying the articles of worship as well as the worshipper himself. Legends describe that the ancestral conch emerged from the ocean of milk when it was churned by the gods and demons for the sake of ambrosia, and that it was adored by all the gods and received by the hand of Viṣṇu. Called 'Pāñca-janya', it is said to be a divinity in its own right. Sun and Moon are said to reside in it; Varuna, the god of waters is said to abide in the middle portion ; Prajāpati, the first born and the progenitor of all beings in its tail portion; and the twin river-goddesses Gaṅgā and Sarasvatī in its front portion. Viṣṇu himself is said to be represented in conch.

Conches are called in Sanskrit 'śaṁkha', which expression signifies elimination of all misfortune ('śāmyati aśubham asmād iti'). Hence they are auspicious. Conches are blown on festive occasions, and no ritual can dispense with it. Conches occur in many sizes and shapes and are classified into many types. There are 'male' conches (having the tail-portion and the head-portion equal in size), 'female' conches (with the head-portion thick), and 'hermophrodite' conches (with the tail-portion thick). They are also grouped into brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaiśya and śūdra varieties. But the most significant is the grouping into 'left-inclining' (vāmāvarta) and the 'right-inclining' (dakṣiṇārvarta). The latter are regarded as very valuable and sacred. The 'superior' conches are said to be got from the river Tāmraparṇī, while the 'ordinary' ones from the river Gaṅgā, and the 'inferior' ones from the river Narmadā. Conches are held so sacred that they are never placed on the floor, but always on a special stand meant for it. The conch is worshipped before the worship for the image





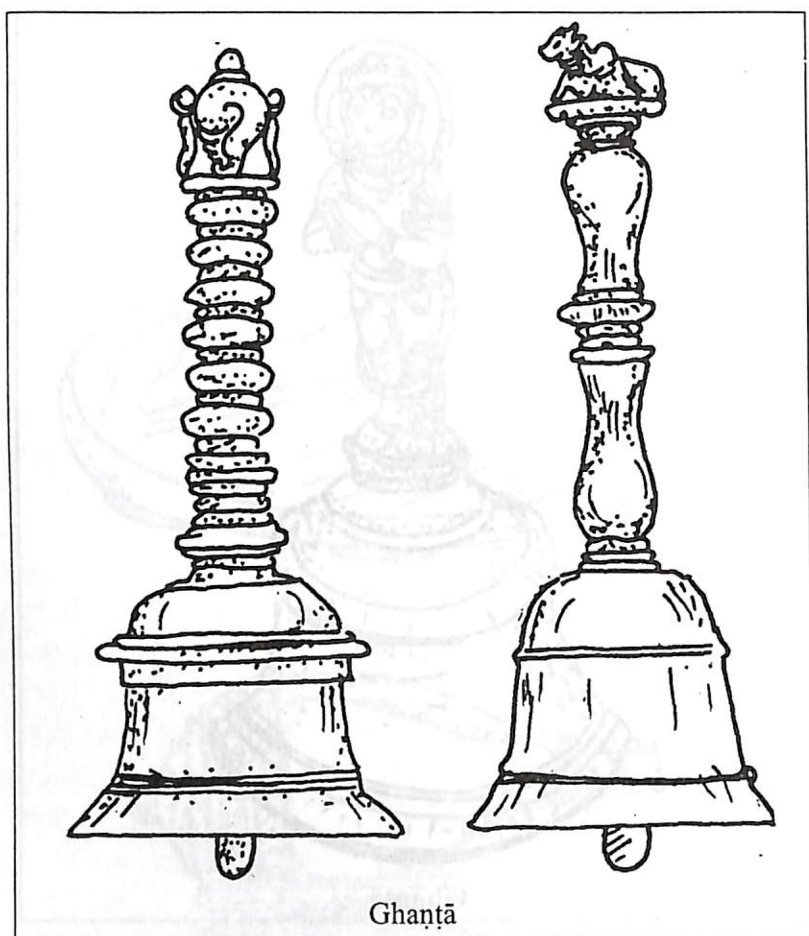
Śaṁkha



Ghaṇṭā

begins and also after the worship is over.

The bell (ghaṇṭā) is an other indispensable article in ritualistic worship. It is sounded even before the actual worship commences, in order to invite the gods to assemble and drive away the evil forces. The sound from a good bell is uninterrupted, reverberating, deep and sonorous. There are bells specially made which will produce the long strains of the sound 'Oṁ'. The ringing of the bell accompanies several worship-sequences, such as waving



Ghaṇṭā

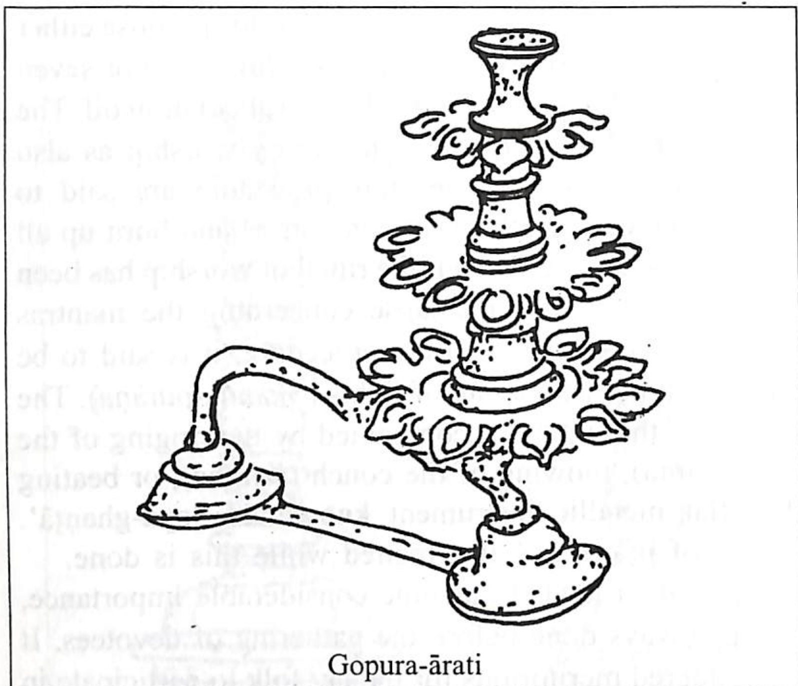
of the light (ārati), administering the ceremonial bath (snāna or abhiṣeka), and the offering of food (naivedya). The body of the bell is said to represent the divinity of time; the handle signifies the vital principle (prāṇa-śakti) in the form of Hanumān, Garuḍa, Nandi or Cakra. The bell without a handle in one of these forms is forbidden to be used in rituals, as it would bring about misfortune.

Waving of light before the image is a ritual known as 'dīpa', 'nirājana', 'ārati' or āratrika ' It is done towards

the close of the worship sequences. For this purpose either camphor (karpūra) is used or a set of three, five or seven cotton wicks dipped in clarified butter (ghee) or in oil. The worshipper who waves the light during worship as also the devotee who witnesses this procedure are said to conquer the dark worlds (viz. ignorance) and burn up all evil done in this life. Even if the ritual of worship has been deficient owing to some lapse concerning the mantras used or some sequence in the procedure, it is said to be made good by the waving of lights (*Skanda-purāṇa*). The waving of the light is accompanied by the ringing of the bell (ghaṇṭa), blowing of the conch (śaṅkha), or beating of a flat metallic instrument known as 'jaya-ghaṇṭā'. Hymns of praise are also recited while this is done.

This ritual tends to assume considerable importance, as it is always done before the gathering of devotees. It is considered meritorious for the lay folk to participate in this ritual sequence. And therefore the ritual is elaborately gone through. Several rounds of waving the lights are resorted to. And different kinds of implements made in silver or bell-metal are used for this purpose, in order to enhance the effect and make the occasion very impressive. Among such implements are those that are shaped like a water-pot (kuṁbha), a tortoise (kūrma), a serpent with seven hoods (nāga), or a tower with the wick-containers arranged in a tapering manner (gopura). Commonly, however, a large round plate is used for the purpose; sometimes a small plate with a long and ornamental handle is used.

Flowers constitute an important article of worship. The image in the sanctum is decorated with garlands of flowers, and flowers (unstrewn) are required for several



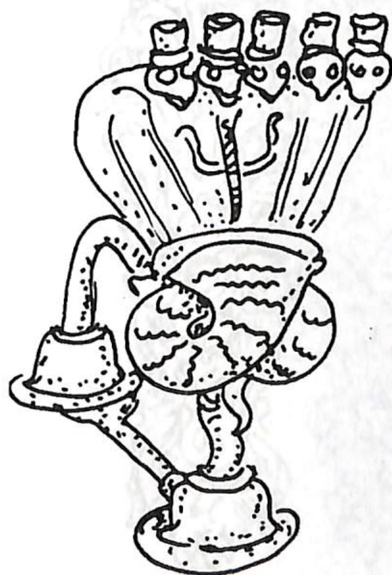
Gopura-ārati

sequences in the worship. The •texts contain prescriptions about the flowers that may be used in rituals. In general, flowers with strong odour or without fragrance at all; the flowers that are still unblossomed or have become old, flowers that are bitten by insects or otherwise mutilated, and flowers that have been kept unused for a day are avoided. Flowers grown in a garden (ārāma) are considered the best; flowers collected from a forest (vana) rank next, and flowers bought (vikrīta) are regarded as inferior.

Flowers are classified with regard to their colour, fragrance, shape and origin. A three-fold classification is mentioned in the texts :

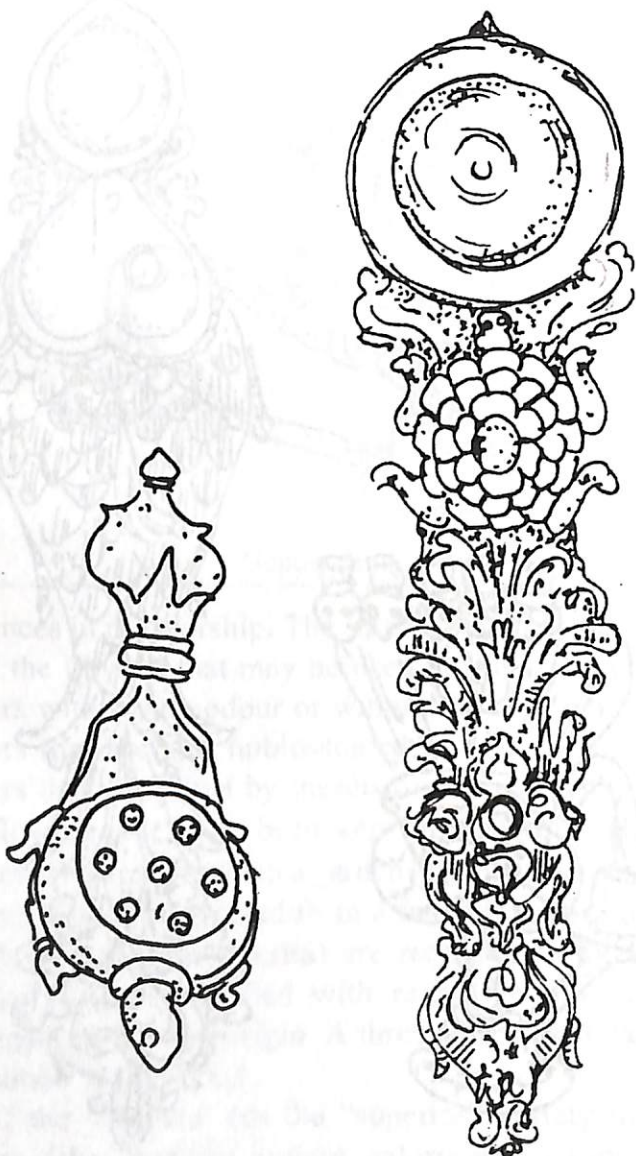
(1) the 'sāttvika' (or the "superior" variety includes flowers like śvetārka (white calotropis), nandyāvarta, droṇa (Leucas linifolia), śveta-padma (white lotus, jāti





Nāga-pāñcārati

Matsya-ārati



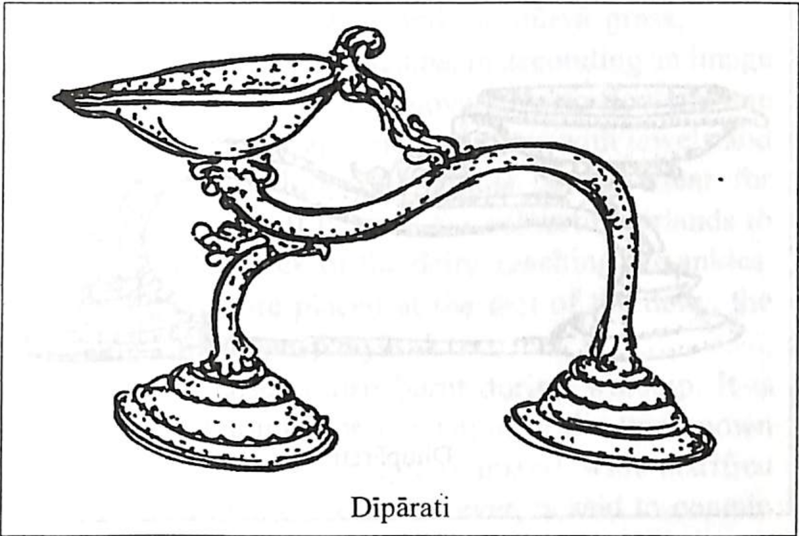
Kūrmārati



Nāgārati



Pañcārati

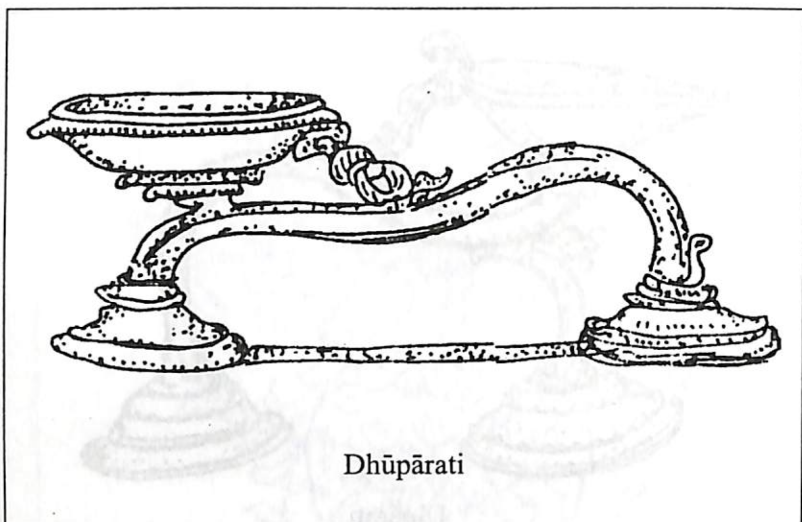


Dīpārati

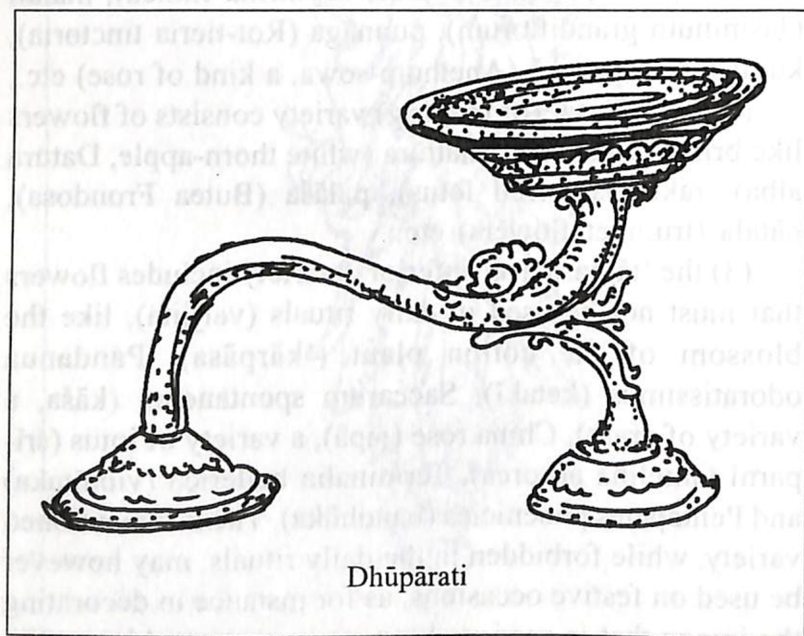
(jasmine), mandāra (coral tree, Erythrina Indica), mālatī (Jasminum grandiflorum), punnāga (Rot-tieria tinctoria), kurava, śata-patrikā (Anethum sowa, a kind of rose) etc.;

(2) the 'rājasa' (or midling) variety consists of flowers like brhatī (solanum), dhattūra (white thorn-apple, Datura alba), raktotpala (red lotus), palāśa (Butea Frondosa), pāṭala (trumpet flowers) etc.;

(3) the 'tāmasa' (or 'inferior') variety includes flowers that must not be used in daily rituals (varjjita), like the blossom of the cotton plant ('kārpāsa), Pandanua odoratissimus (ketakī), Saccarum spontaneum (kāśa, a variety of grass), China rose (japā), a variety of lotus (śrī-parṇī Gmelina arborea), Terminalia bellerica (vibhītaka) and Pentapetes phoeniciea (bandhūka). The last mentioned variety, while forbidden in the daily rituals, may however be used on festive occasions, as for instance in decorating the image that is carried about in procession. Along with flowers, some leaves are also used in worship, like the



Dhūpārati



Dhūpārati

tulasī (basil), the bilva (bel) and the dūrvā grass.

According to *Suprabhedāgama,* in decorating an image for worship, one part must be covered with flowers, one part with cotton or silk apparel, two parts with jewels and other ornaments, and one part must be left clear for worship (pūjābhāga). It is usual for colourful garlands to be hung round the neck of the deity, reaching the ankles. Unstrewn flowers are placed at the feet of the deity, the ritual being called 'puṣpanyāsa'.

Aromatic incense is also burnt during worship. It is usually a preparation of the exudation of the tree known as Amyris Agal-locum (guggula) mixed with clarified butter. The best quality of it, however, is said to contain one part of agaru (Agallocum), two parts of niryāsa (fragrant gum resin), and three parts of candana (sandal paste), all well kneaded with camphor (karpūra) and honey (madhu). Offering incense precedes the waving of light, and hence the two offerings are often together called 'dhūpa-dīpa', before the food-offerings (naivedya) are made.

Different kinds of seats (āsana) for the image are prescribed to be employed in different sequences of the ritual. Uṣually five are employed: an octogonal seat called yogāsana for inviting the deity for worship (āvāhana), a square seat called simhāsana for giving bath (snāna), a circular seat called mahāpadma for actual worship (arcanā), an hectagonal seal called vimala for offering food (naivedya or bhojana), and a triangular seat called anan-tāsana for relaxation or recreation (vinoda). Details of the pentad (pañcāsana) are given in texts like *Candra-jñānāgama* and *Suprabhedāgama.* The former work also provides the information about the symbolic significance of the five

seats : the five āsanas represent the five primary elements, fire (agni), water (apah), air (vāyu), ākāśa and earth (pṛthivī), respectively.

After food is offered to the deity (naivedya), it is customary to present tāṁbūla consisting of some betel leaves (nāga-valī-dala), areca-nut (pūgī-phala), mixed with some camphor-powder (karpūra) and spices for aroma and fragrance. Even when no prepared food (consisting of the four varieties of food, viz., bhakṣya, bhojya, coṣya and pānīya) is available for offering, the tāmbūla is offered along with a coconut and some fruits (plantains, mango etc.). This would be an adequate substitute for the food-offering (naivedya).

In temples where the Vedic influence prevails, fire oblations (havis) are offered daily in the morning or at noon, it is usual to have a separate enclosure for this ritual known as homa or agni kārya. This enclosure may contain a formal platform (vedi or sthaṇḍila) or a fire-pit (homa-kuṇḍa), or may also have a supply of all the implements (like the sruva and sruk) that are required for the ritual, as well as the vessels to contain the articles for oblation (āhuti-dravya). However, priests tend to content themselves with carrying out the most essential details of the ritual, which has now become incidental and routine, if indeed it is performed at all. It must be borne in mind that this ritual bears no natural, nor necessary, relevance to the worship rituals that are conducted in a temple.

After food is ceremonially offered to the main image in the sanctum, portions of food are laid on the altar (bali-pīṭha) and on several spots around the sanctum, in order to propitiate the attendant-divinities (parivāra-devatā). Food is also offered to the 'door-keepers' (dvāra-pāla). In

temples which are affluent, this usually assumes the character of a procession, where some priests along with the bali-icon (beli-bera, a representative of the main image in the sanctum) go about the temple premises, to the accompaniment of music (nāgasvaram, pipe and drums) and ringing of the bells.

Chapter IV

DAILY RITUALS

The word pūjā (meaning 'worship') signifies the fulfillment of the prescribed rituals ('pūryante sarva-karmāṇi') and the obtainment of the knowledge of the divine ('jāyate jñānam ātmani') (*Kāraṇāgama*). Thus the rituals constitute the necessary part of worship. This aspect is emphasized in words synonymous with 'pūjā", viz. saparyā, arcā, varivasyā, paricaryā, and upāsanā (*Amara-kośa*, 2,7,34). The several rituals that constitute the worship are called 'upacāras' or services.

There are as many as sixty-four 'upacāras' listed in texts like *Tantra-sāra* and *Siddha-yāmala*. But in actual practice not more than eighteen are recognized. And it is usual to offer only sixteen upacāras; hence the popular expression 'shoḍaṣopacāra pūjā'. They are fashioned after the details of the customary reverence shown to an honoured guest. They are: (1) seating (āsana), (2) welcoming (svāgata), (3) offering water to wash the hands (arghya), (5) offering water to sip and rinse the mouth (ācamana), (6) providing a bath (snāna), (7) offering fresh clothes arid decorations (vasana-bhūśaṇe), (8) offering a fresh sacred thread (yajñopavīta), (9) offering aromatic substances like sandal paste (gandha), (10) offering flowers (puṣpȧ), (11) burning incense (dhūpa), (12) waving lights, (dīpa), (13) offering four kinds of food (naivedya), (14)

offering tāmbūla (betel leaves, areca nut, camphor and spices), (15) prostrations (namaskāra), along with circumambulations (pradakṣiṇā), and (16) send-off (visarjana).

If the worship has to be brief, only five upacāras are gone through (pañcopacāra) : (1) inviting (āvahana), (2) seating (sthāpanā), (3) establishing communion (sannidhīkaraṇa), (4) worship (pūjana), including offering water for the feet (pādya), offering sandal paste (gandha), offering flowers (pushpa), burning incense (dhūpa), waving lights (dīpa) and offering food (naivedya), and (5) send-off (visarjana). This is a normal routine in household worship which is also followed in the temples with moderate means.

In affluent temples, however, may other details are added like offering of ornaments (ābharaṇa), decorations (alaṅkāra), holding a mirror (darpaṇa), applying unguents (anulepana), fanning with a fly-whisk (cāmara-vyajana), presenting dance and music (nartana, gīta-vādya), reciting laudatory verses (stuti or stotra), presenting fire-oblations (homa), and providing bed (śayana).

These do not include the rituals that the priest has to perform preparatory to worship. The day for the priest commences with a bath after the morning ablutions. It must be noted that the bath itself is a ritual for the priest, for there are prescriptions about the water to be used (well-water or water from the running stream is preferred), the place where the bath is to be had (open), the hymns that must be recited during the bath (snāna-mantra), and the clothes that must be worn after the bath (vastra). The bath is followed by the ritual of internal purification by means of sipping sanctified water (ācamana), regulating

the breathing process for the specified duration (prāṇāyama), and investing the various parts of his body with divine presence (aṅga-nyāsa, kara-nyāsa). Then he performs the customary ritual of sandhyā-vandana, which is indepensable for the twice-born, and proceeds with the āhnika or the day's rituals which are incumbent on him to perform. Then he finishes his household worship (the worship of his tutellary deities in accordance with his family-custom and according to the initiation that he has received), before he goes to the temple for conducting worship there.

Opening of the temple-door for the day is also a ritual. Custom requires that the priest at dawn carries the keys of the temple on his head, goes round the temple thrice, and prostrates before the main door of the temple. It is only then that he reverentially unlocks the door and enters the sacred precincts, along with the attendants. He again circumambulates the main shrine (or the sanctum) thrice, and looks at the tower over the sanctum (vimāna), before he opens the sanctum. He bows to the deity and offers a short prayer. In temples where the entrance of the sanctum is flanked by "door-guardians' (dvāra-pāla), they receive the first homage, even before the doors of the sanctum are opened.

The priest, or his attendant, trims the wicks of the oil lamps, and provides fresh oil for the lamps. The precincts of the temple as well as the vessels used for worship are cleaned, water for the rituals is collected, flowers and other articles required for worship are gathered. The sanctum has to be cleaned by the priest himself, for texts forbid a lay person from entering the sanctum. He also attends to the lamps, which have been left burning all

through the night in the immediate vicinity of the deity. Then he proceeds to formally "wake up' the deity to receive the day's worship. This is technically known as 'prabodhana'. This completes the series of preparatory rituals and signifies preparing (or getting ready) the deity for the sequences of the ritual worship (18, 16, or 5).

Worship in the temple is usually conducted three times in the course of twenty-four hours : morning (prātah), noon (mādhyan-dina) and evening (sāyam). This is known as "tri-kāla pūjā". This is regarded as the minimum number of times beneficial worship may be conducted ; for worship conducted only twice is inadequate, and only once altogether ineffective. But the number may be increased, and some texts provide worship as many as twelve times.

Most of the texts, however, prescribe six times of worship as most beneficial. Known as "śaṭ-kāla pūjā', this worship involves worship at early dawn (pratyūśa, about 5 a.m.), early morning (kāla-sandhi, about 6 a.m.), pre-noon (upa-sandhi, about 9 a.m.), noon (madhyāhna, 12 noon), evening (sāyankāla, 6 p.m.), and late night (ardha-yāma, 10 p.m.). Sometimes an eariy-night worship (known as pradośa-pūjā, at about 8.a.m.) also is conducted.

The Vaikhānasa texts provide for worship six times, whereas the Śaiva texts insist on the 'pradośa-pūjā' as the sixth, before the 'ardha-yāma pūjā', is conducted. The Pāñcarātra texts suggest even 12 times, if possible. However, some texts, which are more realistic, prescribe six times as most desirable but do not preclude three times, two times or even once from the benefit.

Worship at different times have different benefits, according to the texts. Worship early in the morning

(pratyūśa, or arunodaya) is said to increase the cattle-wealth and progeny in the community; in the morning (prabhāta or prātah) to promote religious fervour among the people; at noon, secure prosperity of the kingdom; during afternoon, eliminate enemies and destroy demonic forces; in the evening, to increase wealth and production of grains, and late in the night, to help spiritual welfare of the people.

The ritual of daily worship consists of five main ingredients: The first is inviting the represented divintty to partake in the ritual (āvahana). The second is invoking life-force (sthāpanā) in the representation of the divinity so that the image worshipped is for the time being the divinity itself. This is necessary in household worship, but is not relevant in temples, where the images installed according to āgamic prescriptions are always 'alive' and fit for worship without formal 'infusion of life-force' (prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā). However, the ritual detail of sthāpanā involves seating (āsana) and other formalities of preparing the deity for the day's worship.

This is followed by (3) getting the deity in proper communion with the worshipper (sannidhī-karaṇa), so that the worship conducted becomes effective. The worship proper, (4) pūja or arcanā, is the main stage, which will be described in some detail presently. The final aspect of worship is (5) the formal bidding farewell to the deity (visarjana, literally 'dismissing'), which marks the completion of the ritual.

While the above five details are of universal validity and are in actual practice, customs and sectarian traditions have brought about variations in other particulars which constitute the full ritual.

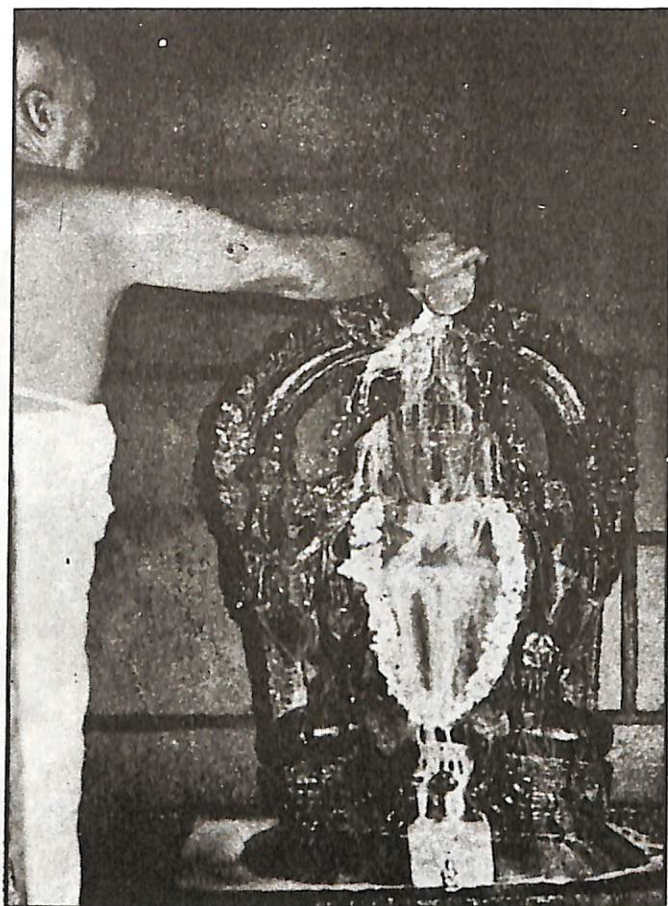
There are variant hymns used and different procedures adopted, according to Vaikhānasa, Pāñcarātra, Śākta, and Śaiva prescriptions. But the five sequences mentioned above are common to all these traditions, and there is in them not much of variation in hymns or in procedures. Thus there is a fair degree of uniformity in the worship, despite differences in the āgama followed. What follows is the ritual sequence, according to the Vaikhānasa tradition, as an illustration.

The priest sits to the right of the image and rings the bell, in order to invite the gods for worship and to scare away the evil spirits. He utters a hymn to this purport. Then he cleanses the earth (bhū-śuddhi), purifies the elements, and recites the resolve to worship, known as 'sankalpa'. He invokes blessings on all the residents of the village, as he is conducting the worship as a representative of all of them.

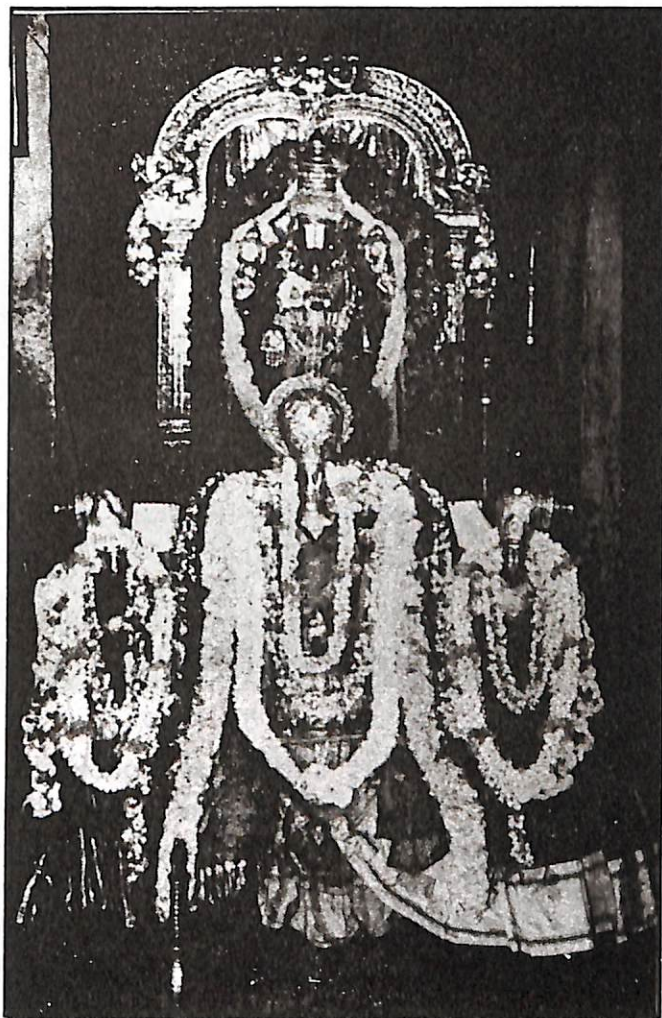
The priest then removes the old flowers from the icon, starting from the East and proceeding in a clockwise-fashion to Northeast, uttering a hymn which seeks to remove diseases and throw away the evil forces. He then obtains permission from the deity to proceed with the worship ritual, and cleans the place of worship with water and lays flowers at the feet .of the deity (nirmālya-śodhana and puṣpa-nyāsa).

This is followed by the transformation and accommodation of all the elements that constitute both the worshipper's own body and the world around (bhūta-saṁhāra-nyāsa). Then comes the ritual of bringing into being the elements that help the worship ritual (bhū-ta-sṛṣṭi-nyāsa), preparatory to the infusion of life-force into the icons that are meant to be worshipped as representatives











of the Highest Spirit. This latter ritual sequence, known as 'prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā' is an important one, as it establishes the necessary communion between the worshipper and the deity worshipped.

The ritual of investing the physical icon with life, so as to make it 'alive' during worship is a highly symbolic procedure wherein the worshipper draws out (of course symbolically) the vital currents from his own 'heart' and infuses them into the icon before him (bimba), and at the same time he draws the presence of the Highest Spirit (paramātmā) into his own individual being (jīvātmā). In the Vaikhānasa tradition, however, the temple ritual is meant to draw the ever-present 'life' in the main,

immoveable stone image (dhruva-bera) and invest it in the small moveable, metallic image that is used in worship (cala-bera). The main image will not thereby be deprived of any of its own life, and the situation is likened to a lamp lighting other lamps and burning as bright as ever. The 'life' present in the main image is ensured in it at the moment of consecration and does not need to be renewed, whereas the moveable images need to be invested with 'life' every time the worship is conducted viz., daily.

After this ceremony, the worshipper proceeds to prepare himself for the worship, by securing competence to worship (bhagavad-ārādhanādhikāra-yogyatā-siddhi) through the ritual of 'brahma-nyāsa' (involving the sequences of invoking divine presence in his heart, in his head, and in the tufts of his hair, and protecting himself from disturbing factors by means of a visualized armour, called kavaca and astra).

Having thus prepared himself, he sanctifies the water that is kept ready for the worship in five vessels. When the water is duly purified, the other articles of worship as well as the platform on which the worship is conducted are purified by sprinkling some of this water on them. The worshipper then conjures up the five forms of Viṣṇu (Satya, Puruśa, Acyuta, Aniruddha and Viṣṇu), and offers flowers at the feet of the main image, which is now connected with the metallic icon on the platform by means of a silken or golden cord (saṁbandha-sūtra).

He then contemplates on the resplendent form of the deity he is worshipping (dhyāna), and removes the icon from its position on the platform (vedi) to a separate seat for bathing (snānāsana), while reciting an appropriate hymn. Commencing with the feet (which are reverentially

washed), a bath with clean water is given to the icon to the accompaniment of a recital of sacred hymns like 'Puruśa-sūkta'. Before the administration of the bath, the icon is formally welcomed (svāgatam), offered water to wash the feet (pādya), offered water to wash the hands (arghya), offered water to sip (ācamana), offered water to clean the teeth (danta-dhāvana), offered water to wash the tongue (jihvā-śodhana) and finally offered water once again to sip and rinse the mouth (acamanīya).

It is customary to use water sprinkled with sweek milk for the second round of bathing, after which the icon is rubbed with turmeric, and again washed with clean water (śuddhodaka). The bath being over, the icon is dried with a piece of cloth (plota) while a hymn is being recited, and then is returned to its former position on the platform. Sometimes, after the regular bath, a shower-bath with a silver plate containing a thousand holes (sahasra-dhārā) is given, before the image is shifted to the platform. The ritual bath is known as snāna, or abhiṣeka or mārjanā. It is usual to employ a conch for giving bath with clean water (śuddhodaka).

When the icon is returned to the platform, the formal worship (pūjā) begins by offering the deity garments (vastra and uttarīya), ornaments (ābharaṇa), sacred thread (upavīta) and flowers (puṣpa). The sequence constitutes the main worship, when flowers, sandal paste and consecrated rice (gandhākṣata), incense (dhūpa), light (dīpa), food (naivedya) and tāṁbūla are ceremonially offered. It is during this sequence that one hundred and eight names (aṣṭottaraśata) or one thousand names (sahasra-nāma) of the deity are recited, offering a flower or tulasī leaves or consecrated rice while reciting each name.

The different offerings during worship are said to have different benefits : water for the hands (arghya) is to please the gods ('deva-prīyārtha'), sandal-paste (gandha) is the favourite article of Brahma, flowers (puṣpa) favour prosperity ('vṛddhi-prada'), incense (dhūpa) is dear to the god of fire ('vaiśvānara-priya'), and food offering (naivedya or havis) is for abundance ('samṛddhi').

On occasions a variant bath known as 'pañcāmrta-snāna' is administered. After the first round of bath in water a bath in milk (dugdha) is given, followed by a bath in curds (dadhi), a bath in ghee (ghṛta), a bath in honey (madhu), a bath in sugar (śarkarā), and a bath in coconut-water (nārikela-jala or phalodaka) are given in order, reciting an appropriate vedic hymn for each article. Finally, bath in clean water (śuddhodaka-snāna) is administered. Before the five articles are used, five forms of the divinity are invoked in them : Vāmana in curds, Viṣṇu in ghee

(clarified butter), Madhūsudana in honey, Acyuta in sugar and Govinda in milk. The vessels containing the five articles are placed before the deity in a definite order : curds to the East, ghee to the South, honey to the West, sugar to the North, and milk in the centre. And before the offering is made, the priest sanctifies the articles with a symbolic gesture known as 'dhenu-mudrā'.

It may be noted that the vessels containing water for different ritual sequences are also placed in a prescribed manner: the vessel containing water for arghya is placed to the North-West, the vessel with water for pādya to the South-West, the vessel for ācamanīya to the North-East, and the vessel containing water to be used for giving the bath (snāna) to the South-East. In the centre is placed the

vessel containing what is known as 'madhu-parka' (literally, 'a mixture of honey', but containing curds, milk, ghee, honey and sugar). The last is the offering usually made to an honoured guest, and in worship it is offered immediately before the bath is given.

Towards the end of the sequence of worship comes the final waving of light (nīrājana), very elaborately done, followed by hymnal offerings (mantra-puṣpa), recital of laudatory verses (stotra), seeking pardon for the lapses (kṣamāpaṇa), circumambulations (pradakṣiṇā) and prostrations (namaskāra).

On special occasions, the deity after normal worship is seated on a throne 'and is treated like a king : an umbrella (catra) is held over the head, fly-whisks (cāmara) are waved, a mirror (ādarśa) is presented, and the deity is entertained by music (gīta, vādya), dance (nṛtta) and recitals from the Vedic literature, poetical works, purāṇic narratives, kalpa-sūtras and Smṛti-texts.

Chapter V

FESTIVALS

The Sanskrit word for festival is 'utsava'. Derived from the root 'sū' (meaning 'generating', 'producing'), and with the prefix 'ut' (meaning 'up', 'rising', 'excitement'), the word signifies an event that generates happiness or excitement (ut sūte harśam'). Thus the lexicon *Amara-kośa* gives "kṣana" ('great moment'), 'uddharśa' ('excitement'), 'mahah' ('auspicious occasion') as synonyms of utsava'. The word also is taken to mean 'up-lifting' ('un-nati'), 'prosperity' (abhyudaya).

The āgama texts give other explanations. The *Uttara-kāraṇāgama* (4,1) takes 'ut' in the sense-of wisdom ('jñānam') and "sava" in the sense of what causes all benefit ('savah kalyāṇa-kāraṇam'). *Puruṣottama-saṁhitā* (32, 2), however, means by 'ut' what is excellent ('utkṛṣṭa-vacanam'), and by 'sava' sacrifice ('yajña'), *Nāradīya-saṁhitā* (18) and *Īśvara-saṁhitā* (10,3) give yet another interpretation : 'ut' means "obstacles", "impediments", ('vighnah') and 'sava' is 'throwing out" ('udgatāh'). Thus 'utsava' is an event calculated to eliminate impediments. Other texts (e.g. *Aniruddha-saṁhitā*, 20, 1, *Pādma-saṁhitā*, 2,10), explain that 'sava' is misery, misfortune ('amaṅgala') and 'ut' is the act of tiding across ; 'utsava' enables us to cross over all sorrow.

Festivals constitute a necessary aspect of any religion.

Besides the benefits which are purely religious, they make for group-feeling and participation and channelize the individual 'energies towards a common social concern. They are especially important in the Indian religions, both in households and in communities. Joint families and rural communities encouraged these festivals for social, economic as well as spiritual purposes. The temple being essentially a collective institution and a centre of social interaction, it attaches significance to festivals, for festivals attract more crowds than the daily worship.

Temples have more festivals than households can possibly manage, and many of them are different from household festivals. Festivals in households are largely calender events with astronomical significance (e.g. Yugādi, Saṅkrānti, Oṇam, Chit-tirai, Ādi, Diwāli, Vasantha-pañcamī, Śrāvaṇī, Vaiśākhi etc.), or in honour of a divinity (e.g. Rāma-navamī, Krisṇa-janmāṣṭamī, Mahā-śiva-rātri, Durgā-pūjā, Vara-lakṣmī-vratam, Narasiṁha-jayanti, Nāga-pañcamī, Gaṇeśa-caturthī, Skanda-śaṣṭī etc.), or for participation in a community activity (eg. Rakṣā-bandhana, Daśara, Vana-yātrā, Kaveri-mūla, Guru-pūrṇimā etc.).

Special worship is offered in temples on all these occasions, but they do not exhaust the number of festivals conducted in temples. In fact, the house-hold festivals are not of much importance in temples, except when the divinity who is worshipped in a festival is also the main deity in the temple (e.g. Krisṇa-jan-māṣṭami in a Krisṇa temple, Mahā-śiva-rātri in a Śiva temple, Gaṇeśa-cauti in a Gaṇeśa-temple). Temples have their own festivals, which are meant to 'contribute to the alround prosperity of the people as well as the nation' ('prajānām api rāṣṭrasya sarvābhyudaya-sādhakam', *Puruṣottama-saṁhitā*,

23,6), to 'undo the evil effects of calamities, famine and terrible portents' ('durbhikṣa-durnimittādighorāṇām śāntidam', ibid.), and to 'bring about welfare of the people by securing for them the four-fold valued in life, viz., virtue, wealth, pleasures and liberation' ('dharmārtha-kāma-mokṣāṇam puruṣārtha-pradam śubham, ibid.7).

Festivals in temples are described in texts as greatly meritorious, as they achieve renewed sanctity for the deities worshipped ('devānām api sarveṣām pavitrīkaraṇāya ca', Īś*vara-saṁhitā,* 11,275), as they help people accomplish all their cherished objectives in life, enhance celebrity, and increase prosperity and prolong life ('āyuṣkaram yaśaskaram saub-hāgya-vivardhanam... sarva-kāma-phala-pradam', *Pūrva-kāraṇagāma,* 141), and as they assure success and victory for the-kings ('rājñām vijaya-vṛddhim' ibid.). *Pādma-saṁhitā* (10, 5) tells us that gods in olden days celebrated their victory when they defeated the demon Vṛtra, and that this was the origin of, and model for, festivals in the worlds of mortals. Another text (*Śrī-praśna*) informs us that Indra, when he defeated Vṛtra in the battle, celebrated the glory of the great god Viṣṇu who in fact gave Indra the strength and guidance. All the festivals on earth are in memory of this festival which Indra and the other gods celebrated in the celestial realm.

Temple festivals are classified into three kinds :

(1) nitya (routine, recurring, necessary), the annual festivals conducted according to the month and fortnight which are considered auspicious,

(2) naimittika (occasional, "nimitte sati kalpitah'), festivals conducted for pacification, in situations like earthquake, eclipse, fall of meteor, appearance of strange objects in the sky, damage to the tower of the temple by

lightning, fire accidents in the temple premises, famine, floods, excessive rain, disturbance in the position of the main image in the sanctum, sight of a second sun, damage caused to the icons in the temple, death occurring within the enclosure of the temple, or defilement caused to the temple in any other way (*Īśvara-saṁhitā,* 10, 1-7, *Pārameśvara-saṁhitā,* 19,5-7 ; *Puruṣottama-saṁhitā,* 23,6, Śrī-praśna, 31,9 etc.); and festivals conducted when a grave calamity befalls the people of the locality, an epidemic, threat of war or illness of the kind (*Aniruddha-saṁhitā,* 20, 2-9; *Pādma-sañcaryā,* 20, 9-18); and

(3) kāmya (to accomplish the cherished goals of the people), festivals conducted to commemorate the building of the temple, of the installation of the main icon, or when desired by the people (*Nāradiya-saṁhitā,* 18, 6; *Īśvara-saṁhitā* 10,8, *Aniruddha-saṁhitā,* 20,10 ; *Pārameśvara-saṁitā,* 16, 7-8).

Of the three kinds of festivals mentioned above, the first is described as sāttvika, or activities done in the spirit of an ordained duty, with no desires attached to them while the second is described as rājasa, or activities done to avert a disaster, repair some damage, or cleanse and purify. The third kind of festivals belongs to the miśra or mixed type. Some texts, however, describe the nitya festivals as 'sāttvika', kāmya as 'rājasa' and naimittika as 'tāmasa' (e.g. *Śrī-praśna,* 31, 16).

Festivals can be conducted only after the daily and customary rituals of worship (nityārcanā) are completed in the sanctum. Any festival is a special occurrence, and cannot take the place of daily worship, much less gain precedence over the latter. In fact, in temples where ancient customs continue to prevail, festivals are conducted quite independently of the worship that goes on in the

sanctum. In the temple on top of the Tirumalai hills in Andhra Pradesh, for instance, the procedure of worship within the sanctum remains altogether unaltered despite the large number of festivals that are conducted there. Not an extra flower is offered, not a single special item of food offering is allowed, not a fresh hymn is recited within the sanctum, even on festive occasions. All the details of the festival are to be found only outside the sanctum. The daily worship to the main deity follows strictly an old tradition, and brooks no departure even in the minutest detail.

That is why it is common to find in temples two varieties of icons : the immoveable main image in the sanctum, which gets daily worship (mūla-sthāna, dhruva-bera), and the moveable icons (cala-bera) to which are conducted rituals connected with festivals (and hence called utsava-bera). In the Vaiṣṇava-shrines, it is common practice to have different icons for different sequences in the worship outside the sanctum (e.g., the snapana-bera to receive the daily bath, bali-bera to dole out the food-offerings to the subordinate divinities in the temple, utsava-bera to be carried about in processions on festive occasions, koluvu-bera to preside over the daily court held in the hall of the temple, etc.). The system of having five icons (including the main image in the sanctum) is known as 'pañca-bera'. While the main image is in stone or wood, the other images are metallic. However, the principal icons are only two: the immoveable image in the sanctum (mūla-bera) and the metallic image that is used for festivals (utsava-bera).

If the daily worship (nityārcanā) takes a few hours to perform, the festival wilt usually stretch for the whole day

and part of the night, and there are festivals that go on for several days. Texts like *Rauravāgama* (kriyā 18,8-9) classify festivals according to the days they take to be completed (cf. also *Chandra-jñāna,* 21, *Ajitāgama* 27, 2-7, *Dīptāgama,* 83 and *Pūrvakāraṇāgama,* 141, 2-3). The festival that is over in a day is called 'śāmbhava' (according to the Śaivite āgama; 'brāhma' according to the Vaiṣṇava texts) ; if the festival goes on for three days, it is 'maukta' (or Śaiva) ; if four five days, it is 'brāhma' (or 'Aindra'); if for seven days it is 'ārśa' (in both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava divisions): and if it is for nine days, it is 'Śākta' (or 'Vaiṣṇava'), (Rauravāgama-kriyā, 18, 8-9 and *Īśvara-samhitā* 13).

There are also festivals that stretch for twelve days, and they are called 'Saura' (ace. to *Dīptāgama* 83) or 'paitṛka' (acc. to *Pūrva-kāraṇāgama,* 141, 4-3). Festivals that go on for thirteen days are called 'kaumāra', for fourteen days 'sāvitrya', and for fifteen days 'cāndra' (*Ajitāgama,* 27, 21-23). *Dīptāgama,* which recognizes all the nine types mentioned above, classifies the last three (from 13 to 15 days) as 'superior' (uttama), the middle three (from 7 to 12 days) 'midling in merit' (madhyama), and the first three (from 1 to 5 days) as 'inferior' (kanyāsa). However, the Vaiṣṇavite texts generally prohibit festivals that go beyond twelve days (e.g., *Hayaśīrśa-saṁhiṭā,* 36,4), although there are texts which extend the limit to 21 days (e.g., *Nāradīya-saṁhitā,* 18,93).

Different benefits for festivals of different duration have also been mentioned in the texts. *Uttara-kāraṇāgama,* for instance, says that the nine-day festival brings about happiness (saukhya) to the people while the seven-day and five-day festivals bring about success (vijaya), and the

three-day, two-day and one-day festivals cause prosperity (ṛddhi). According to *Īśvara-saṁhitā*, the one-day festival is beneficial to the upper castes, the three-day festival eliminates diseases, the five-day festival prevents famine, the seven-day festival increases the power of the people and the influence of the king, and the nine-day festival protects all people in all ways ('sarva-rakṣārtham'). *Nārāyaṇa-saṁhitā* (44) mentions that one-day festivals please Brahma, three-day festivals Śiva, seven-day festivals Lakṣmī, and nine-day festivals Viṣṇu.

There is another classification of festivals suggested in *Kāraṇāgama*, 24, 424-5 which emphasizes the rituals involved rather than the days. Festivals, according to this text, are of four kinds : (1) 'sākalya' ('complete', involving all the rituals, with no exception) ; (2) 'pāvana' ('purifying', involving all the rituals except hoisting of the ceremonial flag, patāka) ; (3) 'śānta' ('bringing about peace', involving fire-rituals or homa in the morning, food-offerings or bali, at noon, and festivities, utsava, in the evening) ' and (4) 'māṅgalya' ('auspicious', involving whatever rituals are preferred by the donor, yajamāna).

Festivals are further classified according to how they begin (utsavāraṁbha). Texts like *Pārameśvara-saṁhitā* (16,28-29) and Nāradīya-saṁhitā (18,7-8) make a three-fold classification, in terms of the ritual marking the commencement of the festival, which is regarded as the "chief ceremony' (mukhya-kalpa) : (1) 'sprout-offering' (aṅkurārpaṇa), which causes all happiness and prosperity ('sarva-sampat-samṛddhidam') ; (2) 'beating the drum' (bherī-tāḍana), which delights the gods ('devānām priyā vaham') ; and (3) 'hoisting of the flag' (dhvajārohaṇa), which causes happiness for all creatures ('sarva-prāṇi-

sukhāvaham'). The benefits mentioned above are according to *Pūrva-kāraṇāgama* (141,3-4). According to *Pārameśvara-saṁhitā* (16,30), however, the benefits of the three kinds of festivals are: causing liberation for all beings ("sarveṣām mokṣadam'), resulting in enjoyment of heaven ('sarga-bhoga-phala'), and causing welfare of the kingdom and the king ('rāja-rāṣṭra-sukha'), respectively.

It is usual for one-day festivals to commence with the 'beating of the drum' (bherī-tāḍana), which signifies invitation for the celestial beings to assemble and participate with the human beings in the festival. *Ajitāgama* (27,23) precludes 'hoisting of the ritual banner or flag' (*dhvajārohaṇa*) for one-day, three-day and five-day festivals. For all other festivals, it is a necessary preparation. *Raurava-kriyāgama* (18) prescribes that festivals which are meant for pacification (śāntika) and nourishment (pauṣṭika) should not have the flag-hoisting ceremony, while in festivals for victory (jayada) the flag-hoisting is optional; and in festivals for wealth (dhanada) and fulfilment of desires (kāmada) it is indispensable.

The day for the hoisting of the flag is to be determined in relation to the day on which the concluding ceremony known as tīrtha-yātrā or avabhṛta-snāna (the ceremonial bath of the icons as well as the devotees in a tank or river, marking the conclusion of the festival), as the latter is regarded as the most significant event in the festival. The day for this event is ascertained by consulting stellar positions and constellations. In fact, there is a classification of festivals in terms of this event. If the ceremonial bath takes place on the ninth day, it is a 'superior' (sāttvika) festival; if on the seventh day, it is of midling merit (rājasa) and if on the fifth day it is 'inferior' (tāmasa) (*Śrī-*

praśna 31,15). Thus the texts insist that the auspicious day for the 'tirtha' is first to be determined (*Puruṣottama-samhita*, 23 'niścitya tīrtha-divasam yāga-karma samārabhet'; *Pūrva-kāraṇāgama*, 141, 'tīr-tham ādau viniścitya').

The flag-hoisting for the festivals (excluding the one-day, three-day and five-day festivals) is performed twenty-one days earlier to the day fixed for the 'ceremonial bath' (tīrtha-yātrā), according to *Nāradīya-saṁhitā*' (18, 17). The flag or banner on which the figure of Indra, (the chieftain of the gods), of Garuḍa (the carrier of Viṣṇu), or of Vṛśabha (the vehicle of Śiva), or an emblem of a god is painted ritualistically and hoisted in front of the temple, to indicate that the festival has begun. Once the flag is hoisted, custom requires that no domestic festivity or function (marriage etc.) can be held within the village until the flag is taken down after the ceremonial bath (tīrtha-yātrā). Human celebrations are precluded during the period when celebrations are being conducted in honour of the deity (*Pādma-sañcaryā*, 10,42).

In a seven-day festival (called 'yasada', for it is said to ensure success and victory in all enterprises), the first day is devoted to the preparation and worship of the flag or banner, which is hoisted on the second day. The third day marks the 'sprout-offering' (aṅkurārpaṇa). Seeds of nine (or ten) kinds of grain (rice, gingelly, millet, tail-pepper, black-gram, mustard, bean called mudga, a legume called simba, Dolichos uniflorus or kulattha) are sown in twelve earthern pots filled with mud ceremonially collected and placed on a specially sanctified man-dala; offerings are made to the spirits in the eight directions, invoking them to protect the sprouts. This ceremony is done during

night, because moon is regarded as the lord of plants. The subsequent days are meant for fire-sacrifice (yāga), a ritual called 'cūrṇotsava', offering of oblations (bali) and the final ceremonial bath (tīrtha).

In case the festival is elaborate, it covers fifteen days, beginning with 'sprout offering' (aṅkurārpaṇa) on the first day, and the following rituals on the remaining days : hoisting of the flag (dhvajārohaṇa), purifying bath (śuddha-snāna) or the beating of the drum (bherī-tāḍana or bherīkā-ghośa), fixing up of the icons and other details (sthāpanā), fire-oblations (homa), offering of food to the attendant divinities (bali-pradāna), the ritual called 'cūrṇotsava', or the procession of the icon in a decorated car in all gaity and splendour (mahotsava or ratha-yātrā), carrying of icons ceremonially to the tank or river for a bath (tīrtha-snāna, or avabhrta), the ritual called puṣpa-yāga, offering of gifts and money to the officiating priests and all others who partook in the festival (dakṣiṇā-sampradāna), and finally taking down the flag ceremonially (dhvajāvarohaṇa), marking the conclusion of the festival (*Viṣvaksena-saṁhitā*, 27,12-16).

The most important festival in a temple is known as 'brahmotsava' so called because the chief of the gods Brahmā himself is supposed to conduct this festival in honour of the presiding deity of the temple. It is usually very grand, spectacular, colourful, and full of gaity ; it draws huge and enthusiastic crowds of devotees, and the village assumes a festive look. It is of considerable social, economic, and political significance, besides the religious import. The celebrity of a temple depends on how grand and popular its 'brahmotsava' is.

Texts speak of five varieties of brahmotsava : 1)

'brāhma', which is only a day's affair, meant to increase the spiritual power of the temple (brahma-tejo-vṛddhi) ; (2) 'śaiva', which goes on for three days and is meant to remove all obstacles to the people (vighna-nāśana); (3) 'aindra', a five-day affair meant for preventing famine and draught (durbhikṣa-nāśa) ; (4) 'ārśa' (also called 'mānuśa'), which is conducted for seven days, meant to secure prosperity for the kingdom (rājya-vardhaka, lakṣmī-prīti-kara) ; and (5) 'daivika' (or 'vaiṣṇava'), a nine-day celebration meant to bring about allround protection and happiness of the people, (sarva-rakṣārtha, prajā-sukhāvaha). The brahmotsava of nine-days is regarded as 'superior', viz., most beneficial (sāt-tvika), and the festivals of seven and five-days are respectively 'of midling merit' (rājasa) and 'inferior' (tāmasa).

The most impressive event of the brahmotsava is of course the procession of the presiding icon in an elaborately decorated and tastefully got-up chariot (ratha), to the accompaniment of music, dance, chanting and incessant cheers from the crowds of devotees. The procession leaves the temple in an auspicious and previously determined moment and goes round the main roads of the village or town. As the chariot carrying the deity winds its way, pulled by eager crowds, householders stop the chariot in front of their houses and offer flowers, fruits and gifts to the deity. The car-festival, as it is generally described, marks the climax of the brahmotsava series of rituals.

Besides procession In the chariot, the presiding deity of the temple is also carried about in procession on different impressive models of birds and animals, vehicles (vāhana) on different days of the festival. Among the popular 'vehicles' are : solar orb (sūrya-maṇḍala), lion

(siṁha), horse (aśva), elephant (gaja), swan (haṁsa), snake (ananta or śeśa), parrot (śuka), flower-pavilion (puṣpa-pīṭha), and the mountain Meru and the wish-fulfilling tree (kalpa-vṛkṣa). In Śaiva temples, bull (vṛśabha), and in Vaiṣṇava temples, Garuḍa and Hanumān are also used as "vehicles', in temples dedicated to Skanda (Subrahmaṇya), peacock (mayūra) Is used. These "vehicles' are usually made of wood with metal cover (often gold-plated), and will be splendid specimens of metal craft. They will be among the proud collections of the temple, and will be displayed in a separate pavilion (vāhana-maṇṭapa).

Texts prescribe what 'vehicles' are to be used on different days of the festival. They also include a spectacular function within the temple enclosure, when the deity is seated in a 'swing' (āndolika) and entertained. *Parama-puruśa-saṁhitā,* which allows a twelve-day festival prescribes palanquin on the first day, followed by lunar-orb, lion, snake, Hanumān, elephant, chariot, horse, swan and solar orb on the subsequent days in order, *Gāruḍa-saṁhitā,* which envisages a fifteen-day festival prescribes the following 'vehicles' in order : flower-pavilion, solar orb, lunar-orb, lion, snake, peacock, Hanumān, Garuḍa, chariot, horse, swan, swing, wish-fulfilling tree and flower-chariot (pusbpaka). *Vāsiṣṭha-saṁhitā,* which suggests only a six-day festival, prescribes lion, Garuḍa, chariot, horse, swan and swing for the six days respectively.

During processions on the streets as well as rituals within the temple during festivals, several musical instruments (stringed, percussion and wind), which are unique to temple music, are employed. In South India, among the instruments used are maddale, karaḍige, sēgaṇdi,

kai-maṇi, parai, śaṅkham, yāl, kuḷal, uḍukkai, kuḍamūlam, kaḷaṁ, etc. During temple festivals, it is also a custom to feed the people freely on all the days of the festival. Events that add fun and frolic, gaity and tempo to the festival are also included, such as 'hunting in a forest' (vana-yātrā), when the presiding deity, dressed up as a hunter, is carried outside the village into the jungle along with young men weilding weapons like spear, cudgel, bows and arrows , or 'sport in water' (jala-kelī or vasantotsava), or yachting or floating.

Festivals that are annual in character and are conducted on fixed days in the calendar (like the viṣu, viśākha, two ayana-saṅkrāntis, pusya, kṛittikā, the birth constellation of the presiding deity, or the date determined by long custom for the brahmotsava) are called nityotsava. These must necessarily be performed, and therefore constitute important events of a temple. Festivals like kalyāṇotsava (or celebrating the wedding of the presiding deity), pavitrotsava (purificatory ritual), and adhyayanotsava (recital of sacred hymns) are also significant.

The number of festivals a temple can afford is determined by the financial resources of the temple as well as the popular appeal the temple has. In the famous temple atop the Tirumalai hills in Andhra Pradesh, there were even in the beginning of the seventeenth century as many as 429 festivals to be performed in the 365 days of the year! Devotees and donors make adequate endowments for festivals of their choice to be conducted in the temple.

Apart from the festivals that are conducted in a temple as prescribed in the āgama texts, there are also festivals arranged by the wealthy or influential donors to celebrate their own birth-anniversaries. The endowments made for

such festivals include food-offerings to the deity as well as free feeding of the pilgrims and devotees in the premises of the temple. Building a temple and consecrating it is also an occasion for festival that goes on for several days. Repairs, restorations, adding new structures, putting up the 'kalasam', or erecting the flag-post (dhvaja-stambha) are also occasions for festivals.

The conduct of a festival requires not only a large group of volunteers, who are lay but devoted, but also a body of specialists in ritual, experts in astrology, masters of ceremony, priests of different liturgical equipment, craftsmen and musicians. The festival is an excellent illustration of team-work. It is an occasion for the entire population of the locality to come together, cooperate and participate in the socio-religious activity. The temple is a public institution, and as such meta-individual and beyond the context of family and sectarian community. A festival in it is, therefore, an activity in which the entire population has a share and an obligation.

Chapter VI

SYMBOLISM OF RITUALS

Man's approach to God takes many forms. One of the most widespread forms is worship. And worship naturally visualizes the incomprehensible divinity in terms of some concrete shapes and attributes, so that the worshipper may easily dwell on it mentally or engage himself in certain services. The āgama-texts mention that divinity conceived of as worshipful may be approached in one of four ways : (1) recitation of the names of divinity in standard formulae (japa) ; (2) oblations offered in fire (homa) ; (3) meditation on the transcendental and empirical aspects of divinity (dhyāna) ; and (4) actual worship of divinity as an honoured guest (arcanā).

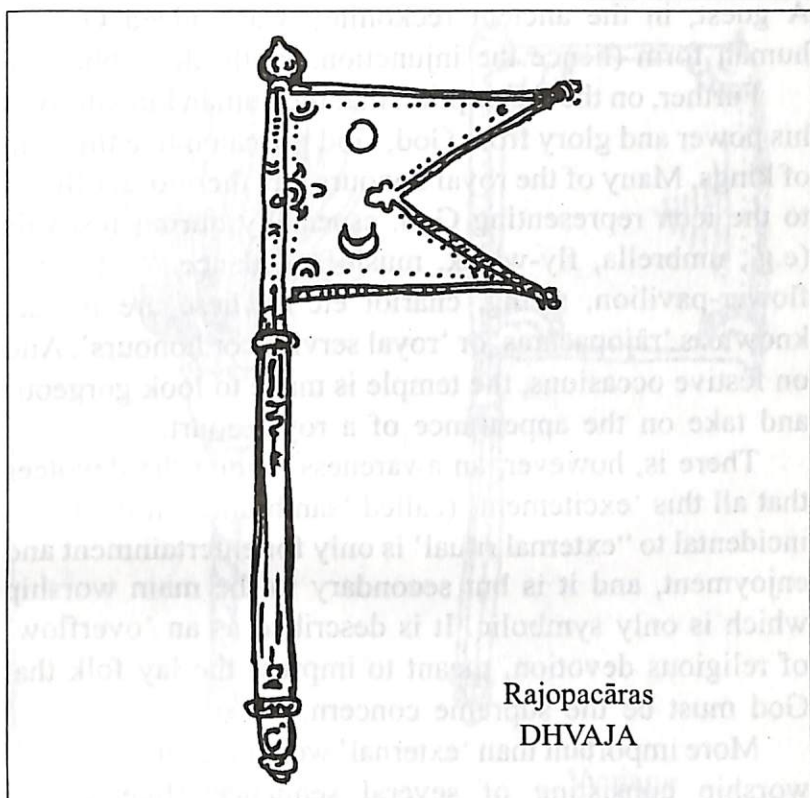
The first of these approaches takes God as a pattern of holy sounds (śabda), the second as represented in fire (agni), the third as independent of concrete representation (nirguṇa), and the fourth as visualized in an icon (arcā or biṁba). Of the four approaches the easiest for the common man to follow is the fourth ; hence the popularity of temples. The other three approaches, however, are incorporated in the actual worship, so that worship in a temple is an integrated mosaic of different details.

The texts classify worship in a temple into Vedic, Tāntrik, and Mixed (miśra) types. It is unlikely that temples of icons were popular in the Vedic culture. The

concrete object of worship for the Vedic folk was frequently fire (Agni), regarded as the visible representation of divinity, and a medium for all the gods in the celestial realms. Oblations offered in the fire while articulating appropriate hymns constituted Vedic worship. The Tāntrik ideology, however, projected divinity in terms of human or semi-human form (mūrti) and in terms of diagrams of merit (maṇḍala), and of formulae of great import (mantra). Temples and iconic worship were a special feature of Tāntrik approach. But in actual practice, the two approaches coalesced, so that in the temple, icons and fire together received worship; arcā and homa were alike rituals that were necessarily involved.

Symbolism is an ingredient of both arcā and homa alike. The individual constitution (piṇḍa) and the cosmic organization (brahmāṇḍa) are essentially identical. The spirit inhabiting the body is in reality the God animating the entire universe. And human mind, functioning with limitations, can comprehend God only in terms of the spirit. Comprehending the really incomprehensible is possible only when forms are given to it. While one is fully aware that human or animal forms (mūrti), meaningful or meaning less sounds (mantra), and involved diagrams (maṇḍala) are mere human approximations, and as such thoroughly inadequate representations of divinity, he finds them useful in getting into communion with the highest. Whether it is agni or an arcā, what it is not as important as how it is approached. In rituals, concepts are more significant than percepts, procedures more significant than concepts, and symbolism more relevant than procedures.

The worship ritual has therefore two distinct aspects:



Rajopacāras
DHVAJA

symbolic (or representational) and actual (or presentational). The former is technically known as antaryāga ('internal ritual') or mānasī-pūjā ('mental worship;), whereas the latter is called bahir-yāga ('external ritual') or the upacāras ('the services'). In the former, God is recognized as the worshipper's own innermost spirit, while in the latter the personified God (represented by the icon) is treated like an honoured guest. All the sixteen 'upacāras' (like invitation, seating, offering water for the feet, offering water to sip and rinse the mouth, providing a bath, presentation of dry and fresh garments, serving food, etc.) are what were usually given in India for a guest.

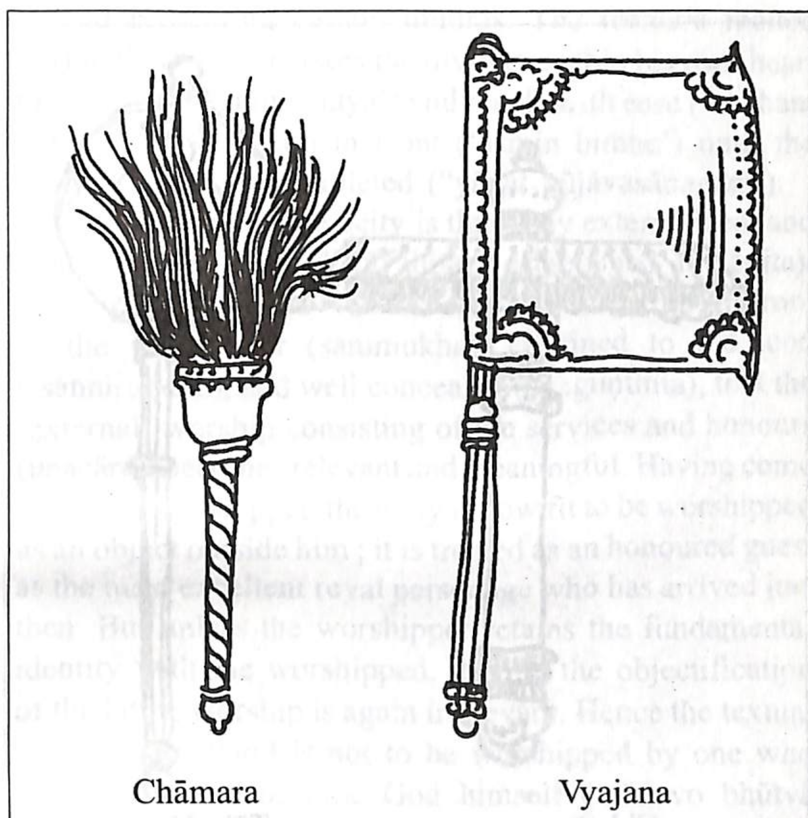
A guest, in the ancient reckoning, was indeed God in human form (hence the injunction, 'atithi-devo bhava').

Further, on the assumption that the human king derives his power and glory from God, God is treated like the king of kings. Many of the royal honours are, therefore, offered to the icon representing God, especially during festivals (e.g., umbrella, fly-whisk, music and dance, "vehicles', flower-pavilion, swing, chariot etc.). These are in fact known as 'rājopacāras' or 'royal services or honours'. And on festive occasions, the temple is made to look gorgeous and take on the appearance of a royal court.

There is, however, an awareness among the devotees that all this 'excitement' (called 'saṁbrama' in the texts) incidental to "external ritual' is only for entertainment and enjoyment, and it is but secondary to the main worship which is only symbolic. It is described as an 'overflow' of religious devotion, meant to impress the lay folk that God must be the supreme concern.

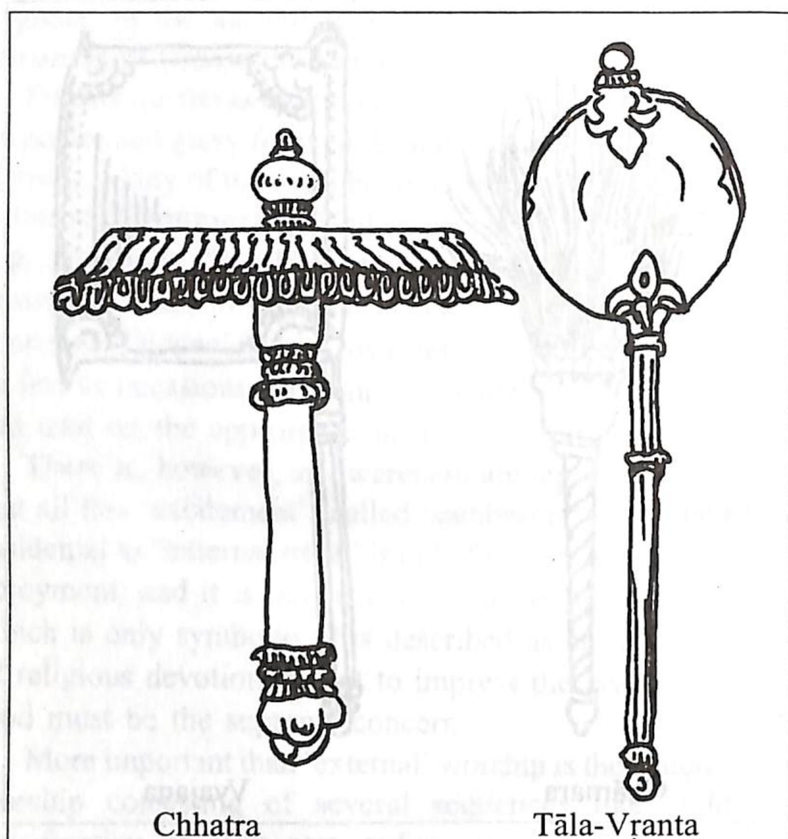
More important than 'external' worship is the 'internal' worship consisting of several sequences like suddhi (purification of elements), nyāsa (placement of divine attributes), mudrā (assumption of appropriate and effective gestures), prāṇāyāma (regulation of breath in order to facilitate the contemplation on the abstract character of divinity), dhyāha (contemplation), prāna-pratiṣtrā (infusion of life into the deity), sohaṁbhāvanā (assumption of identity of worshipped with the worshipper), mantra (the sacred formula which helps realizing the deity in ones own heart), and mandala (mystical diagrams representing aspects of divinity).

'Internal ritual' is mostly conducted within the sanctum, and in private, screened from public gaze ; and by the



Chāmara Vyajana

priests specially initiated into it. The deity stationed in the sanctum, is but an alibi; the priest recognizes the deity as abiding in his own heart. When he contemplates on the deity he attempts to identity the parts of his own constitution (physical as well as psychical) with the assumed aspects of the divine constitution of the deity. The dhyāna thus is an important sequence in 'internal worship'. It is not prayer, nor is it laudatory in character: there are no desires expressed, and no gain contemplated. It is essentially an attunement of the inherently divine nature of the worshipper with the essentially divine nature of the deity visualized.



Chhatra Tāla-Vṛanta

The selection (and communication) of an appropriate and effective mantra for the worship of the deity is an indispensible prerequisite. The priest relies on this for the evocation of the power of the deity. He utilizes also standard and mystical designs called yantras and maṇḍalas as fit abodes for the deity during worship. In fact, 'internal worship' regards the body itself as an yantra for the deity to reside. During 'prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā' sequence, the priest extracts the power (tejas) or lustre of the deity (that is within his own respirations, uccvāsa-nihśvāsa), and invests it upon the physical icon, making an abstract yantra on

it, and presenting certain mudrās. The formula recited during this ritual invokes the divinity within his own heart to come out ('bahir āgatya') and reside with ease ('sukham tiṣṭhatu') in the icon in front ('asmin bimbe') until the worship ritual is completed ("yāvat pūjāvasānagam').

It is only when the deity is thus duly externalized, and made to be invoked (āvāhita), established (sthāpita), present close at hand (sannihita), positioned right in front of the worshipper (sammukha), confined to the icon ('sanniruddha), and well concealed (avaguṇṭhita), that the 'external' worship consisting of the services and honours (upacāra), becomes relevant and meaningful. Having come out of the worshipper, the deity is now fit to be worshipped as an object outside him ; it is treated as an honoured guest as the most excellent royal personage who has arrived just then. But unless the worshipper retains the fundamental identity with the worshipped, despite the objectification of the latter, worship is again irrelevant. Hence the textual prescription; 'God is not to be worshipped by one who has not priorly become God himself ('nādevo bhūtvā devam pūjayet').

When the formal worship is completed, the deity is 'dismissed' or sent away (visarjana). The ritual signifying this involves a "taking back' of the divine presence (temporarily lodged in the icon) into the worshipper's own heart (which is its permanent residence). The worshipper recites the mantra which means "Come, O God who is residing in the icon, come into my heart-lotus' ("Ehy ehi, pratimā-sthita purushottama, mama hṛtkamale'); 'Reside in my heart, O lord of the world, along with your glory' ('hṛdaye kuru saṁvāsam śriyā saha jagatpate').

The 'placement' (nyāsa) or divine presence in the

human constitution is a necessary ritual sequence before the 'services' (upacāra) can be offered. It takes three forms : (1) mātṛkā-nyāsa, the placement of the fifty seed-sounds in the several psychic centres (cakras) and on different parts of the body; (2) devatā-nyāsa, the placement of different aspects of the deity on different limbs ; and (3) tattva-nyāsa, the endowment of the twenty-four basic factors (according to the Sāṁkhya system of thought, which is accepted by all schools of Indian philosophy) to the abstract deity, so that it is individualized. The first form is purely Tāntrik in character, and accomplishes the analysis in the abstract of the entire expressive aspect of the universe (symbolized by speech).

The second form is also Tāntrik, although the Vedic influence in it is obvious, and it has a sectarian character. The aspects of the God dealt with here are so many powers (śakti), enumerated and named according to the seat to which one belongs. The Vaishnavas adopt what is known as the 'Keśavādi-nyāsa', while the Śaivas follow 'Śrīkaṇṭhādi-nyāsa' and the Sāktas 'Kalā-nyāsa'. The third form is largely Vedic, although Tāntrik elements are discernible in it. The first two forms of nyāsa transform the divine character of the worshipper into an abstract form of the deity, which is purely conceptual and therefore unfit for external worship. The last form, however, provides a constitution for this abstract (nirguṇa) form, so that worship rituals could be carried out for it.

While this is the general symbolic significance of the worship ritual, there is a different ideology behind the worship conducted in temples where the image in the sanctum is regarded as 'self-manifest' (svayaṁbhū) or 'installed by celestial beings' (deva-pratisṭhā). The image

in such cases is a permanent repository of divine power, and the priest worships it without having to go through the 'prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā' ritual. For administering the "services' (upacāra), however, a smaller replica (kautuka-bera) of the main image is used. And this image needs to be infused with life at the time of 'services'. But the priest draws the power from the main image itself and not from his own heart.

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